

Ethics in Amos

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DESYRIBUTION STATEMENT

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Distribution Unlimited

Date:

29 April 1997

Approved:

Randy F. Smith

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of Master of
Theology in the Divinity School of
Duke University

19970515 122

1997

DTIC QUALITY INDEX

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My experience as a chaplain in the U.S. Army has led me to see the need for ethical improvement in the military. I am sure there is room for improvement in other professions as well. I am not saying that I think the Army is less ethical than other professions or organizations. I am saying that I see the need for change in the profession to which I belong. My greatest concern is with those in the Army who call themselves Christians. I hope to challenge Christians in the military to live their lives primarily as Christians who also serve in the Army. I hope to challenge my fellow chaplains, and myself, to be change agents and prophetically proclaim the Word of God.

My observation is that Christian soldiers in the Army generally make ethical decisions according to Army ethics and the Army's ethical decision making model. I have noticed that, in the units to which I have been assigned, by far, most soldiers in the Army claim to be Christians. It seems to me that Christians in the Army, or anywhere else for that matter, must first be true to their Christian ethics before applying any other standard to their behavior. Unfortunately, many seem to set their faith aside when "on duty." It is as if personal religious beliefs are subordinate to professional military ethics. Genuine Christian faith is not something that can be subordinate to any other ethical

system. I hope to challenge Chaplains in the military to set the example and encourage other soldiers to be Christians while also being soldiers.

Many have used the Bible to inform ethics, but I am not aware of a book in the Bible being studied and applied to military ethics. Christians in the military are more bound to Christian ethics than to military ethics, or any other ethical system. This paper is an example of asking ethical questions of scripture from the point of view of a Christian in the military. It would be interesting to see this done for other Old Testament and New Testament books, but that is beyond the scope of my present study. I will focus on the book of Amos to discover how Christians in today's Army can apply ethics in Amos.

Of all the books in the Bible to study in search of ethical guidelines, I chose Amos for two reasons. First, I like Amos. I have a fascination with the Hebrew prophets in general and Amos in particular. Second, and related to the first, in the Fall of 1996 I took a course at Duke University on the prophetic movement. For that course, I wrote a paper on ethics in Amos, which forms the basis for this current study. I could have claimed that I chose Amos because it was the first prophetic book, chronologically, in the Old Testament, or that I wanted to begin with the first Old Testament book, arranged alphabetically, but I did neither of these. I chose Amos for the same subjective sort of reason that I usually choose butter pecan ice cream over chocolate or vanilla. Even so, Amos is worthy of such a study on its own terms.

Amos clearly focuses on moral and ethical issues. This is most obvious in references to specific sins of both the Hebrew community and foreign nations. Amos

does not provide us an ethical system, but does provide us with excerpts from a particular ethical way of thinking. Amos deals with a natural law ethics in oracles against the nations and a separate and higher standard of ethics for the Hebrew community. All the ethics in Amos centers on the same ontological premise: the character of Yahweh.

I approached the discovery of ethics in Amos in nine stages. First, I began with a study of Hebrew prophecy in general, since Amos was a Hebrew prophet. Second, I investigated the setting in which Amos prophesied. Third, I studied the theology of Amos, assuming theology shapes ethics. Fourth, I dealt with the issue of redactions of Amos. Fifth, I briefly summarized information concerning Amos the prophet and Amos the book to set the stage for the exegesis of Amos. Sixth, I did an exegesis of Amos. Seventh, I distilled from Amos some ethical applications valid for today's world. Eighth, I assessed the current state of ethics in the military and studied recent literature on military ethics. Finally, I applied the ethics of Amos to today's military. The stages of my approach to the discovery of ethics in Amos are reflected in order by chapter except for the redaction and exegesis stages that I placed as appendices at the end.

Before I go on, I need to mention my views about the relation of Amos to biblical and Christian ethics and the relation of biblical ethics to Christian ethics. Biblical ethics focuses on the Bible as the source and basis for doing ethics. Christian ethics involves more than biblical ethics. Christian ethics often involves appeals to tradition, reason, and experience as authoritative ethical sources. While Christian ethics may refer to the Bible as an ethical authority, it is not limited only to the Bible.

The Bible contains a variety of ethical viewpoints. Since biblical ethicists proclaim a variety of, and often contradictory, ethical conclusions, many scholars have abandoned all hope of using the Bible as their primary authority for ethics. My own viewpoint, however, is that the Bible has been, is now, and will continue to be, for Christians, the inspired Word of God. The Bible is the Church's book. If we have problems interpreting the Bible, this should suggest not that the Bible is of little use to us today, nor that the Bible is hopelessly confused, but that the interpreters are confused. Since the Bible is the Word of God and the Church's book, it is our primary authoritative source for ethics. The Bible norms Christian ethics.

I hope to encourage a back-to-the-Bible way of doing Christian ethics. I am concerned that the Bible is being increasingly ignored and devalued, at least among scholars today. As I see it, doing biblical ethics is doing Christian ethics. There are other approaches to doing Christian ethics than appealing to the Bible, but I want a sure footing, a solid base that others and I can take as authoritative. I reject the notion that biblical ethics is hopeless. I do, however, seriously question the value of any ethical system that does not base itself on the Bible at all.

Amos is only one book in the Bible. A complete account of biblical ethics would include all the books in the Bible. Eventually, biblical ethics would also include a synthesis of the books of the Old and New Testaments, looking at pervasive ethical concepts throughout the Bible. Although there are historical and cultural differences between our day and Amos' day, the Holy Spirit can work through our imagination and hard work to reveal God's truth to us. To deny this is to devalue the authority of God's

Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe Amos and the rest of the Old and New Testaments shape Christian ethics more than any other source. I cannot do a thorough application of the Bible to Christian or military ethics. That would require years of research and many volumes. My *Ethics in Amos* is only a start. I hope that this study of Amos will encourage other chaplains and Christians in the military to continue the study into what the Bible has to say about the ethics of Christians in the military. Doing biblical ethics is not easy, but it is worthwhile. After all, we are dealing with the very Word of God.

CHAPTER 2

HEBREW PROPHECY

The Prophets

The Old Testament prophets were deeply rooted in the tradition of the Hebrew faith and, at the same time, quite unique individuals. From within that tradition these prophets consistently proclaimed, as von Rad says, "the removal of the old distinction between sacral and secular."¹ Their view of the world did not leave room for the existence of a secular sphere outside the concern and attention of Yahweh. The biblical² prophets, however, also "formed only a small and in several respects anomalous minority of prophets in Israel at any given time," according to Blenkinsopp.³ Biblical prophets, unlike the generic professional prophets, often did not desire, and even resisted, their calling. The usual prophets of the day were cult-supported professionals. Dearman thinks prophets in general "are not usually isolated individuals (contra Wellhausen and company) but normally depend on support groups and some institutions within their society for toleration and affirmation."⁴ I believe this was true of the common cultic

¹ Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), 21.

² I am using "biblical" to mean those Hebrew prophets found in the Old Testament, as opposed to the much larger group of prophets who did not make it into the Bible.

³ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 15.

⁴ J. Andrew Dearman, "Hebrew Prophecy and Social Criticism: Some Observations for Perspective," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 134.

prophets, but not of the biblical prophets. The biblical prophets were often separated from an outside (cultic) support base. Von Rad concludes, "The importance which the prophets attached to their call makes it quite clear that they felt very much cut off from the religious capital on which the majority of the people lived, and dependent instead on their own resources."⁵

The role of the biblical prophets was not to maintain the status quo. In fact, Blenkinsopp says, "more often than not they played a destabilizing rather than a validating role in the religious life of their contemporaries."⁶ The prophets upheld God's standards and usually challenged a rebellious and stubborn people to live according to God's will. According to Honeycutt, the prophets "were uniquely conscious of declaring a message which, although their own, was not essentially their own at all."⁷ They saw their role as preaching God's specific message. Their job was not to be successful in the world's eyes, but simply to say and do whatever God told them to say and do.

Honeycutt explains, "Two necessary factors combine to produce the prophetic message. These are (1) the events of history, often of a crisis nature, and (2) the interpretation of those events in the light of divine revelation."⁸ This was true of biblical prophecy, but not most Hebrew prophecy. Prophecy was a routine part of Hebrew life, but only the prophecy that grew out of the crises affecting the life of the whole nation, prophecy outside the routine, survived canonization. Crucial events in the rise and fall of

⁵ von Rad, 35.

⁶ Blenkinsopp, 15.

⁷ Roy L. Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," *Review and Expositor* 63, no. 4 (Fall 1966): 443.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 444.

Israel, especially during the Assyrian and Babylonian periods of conquest and domination, provide the backdrop to most of the prophecy in the Old Testament. Kelly writes, "The Old Testament prophets and thinkers saw at various times that God was about to punish the Israelites for their wickedness, especially for their maltreatment of the poor."⁹ Although the message of God and the prophets was sometimes curse and sometimes blessing, the Hebrews as a rule kept behaving so that the judgment of God was the more dominant topic. The sins that caused God's judgment were usually social sins. This is why Dearman writes, "Social criticism is a constituent of ancient Hebrew Prophecy."¹⁰

Pre-Eighth Century Prophecy

Before the eighth century the audience of biblical prophecy was northern Israel, not southern Judah. As Blenkinsopp writes, "During the two centuries from the death of Solomon (ca. 925) to the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.E.) references in history to prophets and prophecy are restricted entirely to the Northern Kingdom."¹¹ This is not to say prophets were silent in Judah, but that none of the prophecy there survived the redaction and canonization process. Furthermore, as to the general nature of pre-eighth century prophecy, Blenkinsopp writes, "A constant feature of prophecy during this period is association with warfare and religious oracles."¹² Prophets were handy to have around in wartime to curse enemies and bless the Hebrew war effort.

⁹ James Kelly, "The Biblical Meaning of Poverty and Riches," *The Bible Today* no. 33 (December 1967): 2283.

¹⁰ Dearman, 131.

¹¹ Blenkinsopp, 69.

¹² Ibid., 74.

Eighth Century Prophecy

The eighth century prophets, well known for doom and destruction messages, were not contrary to the traditional Hebrew faith. Blenkinsopp writes, "By the eighth century, in fact, Israelite prophecy had a history of some three centuries behind it."¹³ These prophets did not represent a break with their past. Dearman writes, ". . . they were thoroughly conditioned by the older traditions of Yahwism which they reinterpreted and applied to the times of crisis in which they lived."¹⁴

Commentators debate which came first and influenced the other: deuteronomistic history and law or the (biblical) prophets. Blenkinsopp writes, "The Deuteronomistic history was written to explain the disasters that overcame both kingdoms as the result of failure to heed the prophetic warning."¹⁵ Likewise, Hammershaimb writes, "Wellhausen denied that the teaching of the prophets was based on the Law; indeed, he regarded the Law as coming after the prophets. This could be seen with particular distinctness in Deuteronomy which bore the impact of the prophets' teaching."¹⁶ While others disagree with these scholars, I think these scholars are right.

The major difference between pre-eighth century prophecy and classical prophecy is that, beginning with Amos, classical prophecy was written. The new element introduced by eighth century prophecy was not in theology or religion, but in the fact that, for the first time, prophets addressed not just listeners, but readers as well. The shift

¹³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴ Dearman, 133.

¹⁵ Blenkinsopp, 63.

¹⁶ Erling Hammershaimb, "On the Ethics of the Old Testament Prophets," in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 76.

to literary prophecy changed Hebrew prophecy more than any other factor. Prophecy's roots included some strange techniques that we would take to be irrational today: ecstatic trances and visions, "reading" animal innards, and mimetic magic. Haran writes, "There was an ecstatic, hallucinative, irrational element in the classical prophets' mode of action, but it also had a rational and lucid sober-mindedness."¹⁷ The rational and sober-mindedness of classical prophecy was due most to its being a written document. It is difficult to *write* prophecy while in a trance. Written prophecy required rational thought. Haran writes, "The prophetic experience itself was certainly ecstatic in character, obscure and irrational, and, to all appearances, the classical prophets underwent it mostly in the form of dreams (in the early prophecy it probably was not connected with this form alone). But the literary expression which was given to this experience is certainly sober, clear and rational."¹⁸

The role of the eighth century prophets was the same as that for prophets in general. Auld points out that "Israel's classical prophets had a fundamental concern with social justice."¹⁹ The strong attack of social sins and the message of impending doom has led some mistakenly to see eighth century prophets as social reformers. The prophets simply delivered God's message. Liscal writes, ". . . the prophets were primarily and essentially religious figures . . . their role was to announce the approaching doom of Israel because of her sins, social and otherwise, not to herald a program of reform and progress."²⁰ Agreeing with this, Dearman writes, "Furthermore, it should be stressed that

¹⁷ Menahem Haran, "From Early to Classical Prophecy: Continuity and Change," *Vetus Testamentum* 27, no. 4 (October 1977): 396.

¹⁸ Ibid., 396-7.

¹⁹ A. Graeme Auld, *Amos* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 9.

the 'solutions' to the social problems found in the prophets do not for the most part consist of social programs or even detailed instructions."²¹ On another mistaken view of eighth century prophets, Dearman writes: "Several have concluded that the prophets reacted against a developing capitalism in Israel and Judah. . . . It is questionable, however, if ancient Israel's society is best described as capitalistic or if it is adequate for scholars to accuse the anonymous rich without seeking information about their social setting and privileges. To describe an ancient, non-Western, preindustrial society as capitalistic is anachronistic."²²

Restoration and hope passages are the rule, not the exception. These passages usually occur at the end of prophetic books or collections of prophetic material. Amos is no exception to this rule. The debate, however, is whether restoration passages are additions by later redactors, usually thought to be post-exilic, or whether restoration and hope passages are genuine contributions of the prophet. The commentators are divided on this, and argue the same evidence both ways. Some argue that restoration passages are obviously later additions since they appear to be similarly appended to many prophetic books and reflect the hope of restoration following the fall of kingdoms and periods of exile. Others argue that restoration passages are obviously genuine since they appear similarly at the end of many prophetic books, showing it must have been a common way of writing prophecy, and these passages reflect the hope of restoration that fits the time of prophet, after a king's death or some lesser setback, rather than just times

²⁰ John A. Lucal, "God of Justice: The Prophets as Social Reformers," *The Bible Today* no. 32 (November 1967): 2223.

²¹ Dearman, 141.

²² Ibid., 136, 137.

after destruction and exile. Lucal's view is similar to the latter view. He writes, "Yet the prophets held out hope for the nation--after the disaster."²³ I think, however, the former view is correct. As a rule, restoration passages are later additions.

²³Lucal, 2224-5.

CHAPTER 3

THE SETTING OF AMOS

The World Scene

Almost all commentators recognize that the times in which Amos prophesied were good economical and political times for Israel and Judah. McKeating points out that the first half of eighth century was a kind of "Victorian age" for Israel and Judah. No great powers threatened them. Assyria was quiet and Egypt was weak. Stability and national prosperity were the rule. Unfortunately, however, in this same age "the national wealth was not at all equitably distributed."¹ Huey writes, "Amos appeared on the scene in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II, a time of relative peace and prosperity in both Israel and Judah. Some of the people enjoyed great wealth, but others experienced crushing poverty."² Vawter similarly writes, "Amos prophesies against the backdrop of Israel's greatest territorial expansion, nationalist enthusiasm, and material affluence. It was a time of complacency, self-satisfaction, conspicuous consumption, and comfortable religiosity."³ Furthermore, in discussing Amos' message, Alger writes, "His message was

¹Henry McKeating, *The Books of Amos, Hosea and Micah*, a vol. of *The Cambridge Bible Commentary*, eds. P. R. Ackroyd, A. R. C. Leaney, and J. W. Packer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 1.

²F. B. Huey, "The Ethical Teaching of Amos, Its Content and Relevance," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (Fall 1966): 58.

³Bruce Vawter, *Amos, Hosea, Micah, with an Introduction to Classical Prophecy*, vol. 7, *Old Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, eds. Carroll Stuhlmueller and Martin McNamara (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1981), 21.

given at a time of prosperity. It announced impending doom and judgment, for with the prosperity had come its attached vices of extortion, hypocrisy, corruption and social injustice."⁴

Amos could see that the good times were about to end. Amos also could see that the so called good times were not really good for most of the people. Like a Paul Harvey of his day, Amos knew "the rest of the story," and it did not look good. McKeating notes that the second half of the eighth century was not at all like the first. Tiglath-Pileser III came to power in 745 B.C., and Assyria woke up. Samaria fell in 722 to Assyria. Israel went from prosperity to being a vassal state. Judah fared better than Israel by not being so arrogant against Assyria. However, Judah, too, was soon to suffer.⁵

Hebrew Society

With all the corruption in society, one would think that the Hebrews must have moved away from practicing their religion. "However, the people could not be accused of neglecting religion. Ritualistic practices abounded," says Huey.⁶ The Israelites in Amos' day were like the people of Athens in Paul's day. As Lucal says, "Israel . . . was a religious society."⁷ Unfortunately, as Alger says, "This religious activity had little effect in the day to day life of these people."⁸ Hyatt notes that, even with the abundance of religious activity and ceremonies, "most Israelites thought that religion consisted largely of formal observances--paying tithes, attending religious festivals, making sacrifices, and

⁴B. Alger, "The Theology and Social Ethic of Amos," *Scripture* 17, no. 40 (October 1965): 109.

⁵McKeating, 1.

⁶Huey, 58.

⁷Lucal, 2224.

⁸Alger, 111.

the like."⁹ What the Israelites did not seem to see was any relation between their religious life and their community life.

No one can read Amos and miss the explicit descriptions of the immorality that was so prevalent in those days in Israel. Social evils and meaningless worship describe most of Israel's sins in Amos. Alger writes, "The basic faults in society which aroused Amos were the luxurious life of the richer classes, the injustice of the courts, oppression of the poor and weak, immorality, and hypocrisy in worship."¹⁰ Hyatt picks up on how the wealthy oppressed of the poor: ". . . some of the Israelites were living in great wealth . . . lived in large fine houses . . . ate rich food . . . leisure in idle banqueting . . . merchants were avid in the pursuit of wealth, not hesitating to be dishonest if they thought it necessary . . . bribery was often practiced in the law courts . . . a large number of landless poor and slaves who supported the small number of wealthy people."¹¹

Huey also points out just how rotten it had gotten in Israel: "The poor were oppressed, cheated, and exploited. Their rights were ignored. Immorality of every kind was openly and unashamedly practiced. Drunkenness, adultery, licentiousness, and self-indulgence had rotted the moral fiber of the nation."¹² For such a religious people, it is amazing how every part of their lives had become so totally depraved. It is also amazing that almost no one, other than Amos, seemed to be able to see just how bad things had become. It demonstrates how sometimes an objective outsider can see truths of which those inside are unaware. In other words, Israel "could not see the forest for the

⁹ Philip Hyatt, "The Book of Amos," *Interpretation* 3, no. 3 (July 1949): 342.

¹⁰ Alger, 110.

¹¹ Hyatt, 341.

¹² Huey, 58.

trees." Amos could see both the forest and the trees. However, even Amos did not diagnose the situation on his own. Amos' "vision" came from God. John Smith writes, "Amos, with the force of inspiration, discovers the moral decay of a Godless civilization. First, abounding avarice, in which every consideration of right or of humanity is sacrificed to money-making."¹³

Alger writes, "The injustice in Israelite society struck most at the poor and the weak."¹⁴ According to Thomas, Amos was able to see a great disparity between "the economically poor but morally abstemious Tekoan group and the luxuriously wealthy and morally lax group of the city civilization of Samaria."¹⁵ Furthermore Thomas writes: ". . . these poor were poor in spite of the fact that they lived in the midst of plenty. . . . the rich were rich because they drove hard bargains and cheated and oppressed the poor, because they violated every canon of equality, and yet were doing so under the aegis of religion."¹⁶ Alger points out that what was going on "was the control of the land by the wealthy in such a way that it led to the impoverishment of the poor."¹⁷ Auld maintains, "The disparity between rich and poor which Amos found so objectionable may have been the result, not of recent prosperity acquired by some under Jeroboam's long reign, but of a longer established decline which bore most heavily on the poor."¹⁸ Whether the mistreatment of the poor came during a period of national prosperity or during a

¹³ John Smith, "The Burden of Amos," *The Expository Times* 11, no. 2 (November 1899): 87.

¹⁴ Alger, 111.

¹⁵ D. E. Thomas, "The Experience Underlying the Social Philosophy of Amos," *The Journal of Religion* 7, no. 2 (March 1927): 139.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁷ Alger, 109.

¹⁸ Auld, 13.

following period of economic decline, as Auld maintains, does not change that the seeds of social evil began in the "good times." In reviewing Amos and Hosea, Vawter sums up the situation this way: "It is these prophets who have told us how all this prosperity was façade covering official corruption and apathy, a callous disregard for basic human rights, and a system that reduced the poor and defenseless to a state of peonage. The great society guaranteed the comfort of the few at the expense of the misery of the many."¹⁹

By now, to say that justice was lacking in eighth century Israelite society appears to be an understatement. The violation of God's principle of justice becomes for, Amos, a principle ground for God's judgment to follow. About the pervasiveness of injustice in Israelite society, Thomas writes, ". . . the prophet soon saw that these evils do not cease their ravages at the borderline of pure business; they extend themselves into the wider industrial situation; they enter the home and the church, the courts and the government . . ."²⁰

Since modern capitalism is so pervasive and inaccurately shapes our understanding of "poor" and "rich" when compared to the way the terms were viewed in Amos' day, we probably should use instead the words "powerful" and "powerless." How much money one had played a part in determining who the rich and poor were in Amos day, as Hyatt says, "The wealthy bought 'justice' . . ."²¹ However, money was only part of the definition of poor and rich. The poor were those lacking in power politically,

¹⁹ Vawter, 21.

²⁰ Thomas, 143.

²¹ Hyatt, 342.

socially, economically, and religiously. The rich were those who had power in these areas. Furthermore, Howington writes, "The political sphere generally is the area wherein power is concentrated, where public policies and laws are framed, where decisions are made that affect the whole life of a nation."²²

Amos

Concerning Amos' relationship to Elisha and Jeroboam II, Blenkinsopp writes, "Elisha died in the early years of the eighth century, during the reign of Joash (ca. 801-786 B.C.E.). Jeroboam II, the son of Joash, succeeded him and led Israel to a high point of political success and economic prosperity, a situation reflected in the book of Amos. This prophet, who was most probably born while Elisha was still alive, was to pass judgment on the second-from-last representative of the dynasty set up with Elisha's backing."²³

We can date the prophetic ministry of Amos, as Hyatt maintains, to about 750 B.C.²⁴ Most scholars agree with this date, give or take five or ten years. As McKeating points out, Amos prophesied while Israel was still prosperous and before the fall of the Northern Kingdom (before 722 and probably before 745). If Amos prophesied after 745 we would expect that he would have mentioned Assyria and Tiglath-Pileser III by name, which he did not.²⁵ Concerning the date of Amos, Hyatt writes, "He came at the end of a fairly long era of peace and prosperity, both in Israel and Judah. Jeroboam II in Israel

²² Nolan P. Howington, "Toward an Ethical Understanding of Amos," *Review and Expositor* 63, no. 4 (Fall 1966): 407.

²³ Blenkinsopp, 77.

²⁴ Hyatt, 341.

²⁵ McKeating, 2.

and Uzziah in Judah had long and outwardly successful reigns. They defeated their enemies and gave their people peace.²⁶ Therefore, the middle of the eighth century seems to be the most logical assumption as to the date of Amos.

Did Amos know Assyria would be the instrument of God's judgment he proclaimed against Israel? Probably not. Williams writes, "In actual fact, the conspicuous absence of any direct reference to Assyria as the agent of destruction reveals Amos' theological depth: whether the agent of destruction was Assyria or some other nation, the fact was that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the one ultimately responsible."²⁷ The most we can get from the conspicuous absence of reference to Assyria is evidence toward dating the book of Amos before Tiglath-Pileser III's rise to power in Assyria in 745 B.C., as mentioned above.

McCullough maintains, ". . . while Amos undoubtedly preached at Bethel (7:13), and possibly at Samaria (4:1), most of his words were in fact directed to the whole of Israel, North and South, and it is a fair presumption that part of his ministry was spent in Judah."²⁸ Most scholars disagree--and so do I--with McCullough on this point. We maintain that Amos preached in Israel, not Judah. Also, Amos targeted his message not to all of Israel, but to the powerful. Ward describes the specific audience this way: "The rulers of Israel appear to have been the primary audience of Amos and Hosea; however, this category included not only the kings, but also government officials, priests, and elders, in short, the upper class of the nation."²⁹

²⁶ Hyatt, 341.

²⁷ Donald L. Williams, "The Theology of Amos," *Review and Expositor* 63, no. 4 (Fall 1966): 401.

²⁸ W. S. McCullough, "Some Suggestions About Amos," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72, pt. 4 (December 1953): 249.

Since he views Amos' audience to be the whole of Israel, McCullough sees Amos' use of the word "Israel" to refer to both Judah and Israel. McCullough further maintains, "The accounts of Jeroboam II's reign in Samaria (II Kings 14:23-29) and of Uzziah's in Judah (II Kings 15:1-7, II Chron 26) do not encourage the conclusion that one state was religiously worse or better than the other."³⁰ Billy Smith agrees with McCullough that Amos speaks to all of Israel (both kingdoms).³¹ However, I think this is an inaccurate assessment of Amos. As a rule, after Solomon and before the fall of the northern kingdom, while there were two separate kingdoms, the prophets used "Israel" to mean only the northern kingdom, not Judah.

²⁹ James M. Ward, *Amos, Hosea* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 3.

³⁰ McCullough, 250.

³¹ Billy K. Smith, "Amos," in *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, vol 19b of *The New American Commentary*, eds. Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page, pp. 23-170 (USA: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 23-170.

CHAPTER 4

THE THEOLOGY OF AMOS

Amos does not give us a systematic theology. Ralph Smith writes, "Amos nowhere set out a systematic presentation of his personal theology."¹ Theology certainly shaped and drove Amos, but that theology lies under the text we have before us. Amos probably never thought much about theology for its own sake. Ralph Smith further writes, "The Book of Amos is not a closely reasoned book on the nature of God, man, sin, and salvation."² For us to discover Amos' theology, we will have deductively and inductively to evaluate the biblical evidence.

Watts reminds us that Amos ". . . never presented himself as bringing something new. . . . he bases his faith and message on the basic elements of Israel's ancient confessions."³ Amos was firmly rooted in the Hebrew religious tradition. According to Ward, Amos ". . . was the defender of an ancient faith and moral commitment which he shared with his audience. He spoke from within Israel's religious tradition, not from without."⁴ Several examples illustrate this fact. Ackroyd writes, "The content of Amos' teaching and its highly developed poetic style indicate one who stands in a

¹Ralph L. Smith, "The Theological Implications of the Prophecy of Amos," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (Fall 1966): 49.

²Ibid., 50.

³John D. W. Watts, "Amos--The Man and His Message," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (Fall 1966): 22.

⁴Ward, 2.

long-established religious tradition.⁵ Dearman says, "Following the lead of von Rad and others, scholars have located the prophetic social critique in covenant theology, amphictyonic law, wisdom ethos, etc., in an attempt to show prophetic dependence upon earlier ideals and standards which the majority of the prophet's contemporaries had neglected."⁶ Thomas writes, ". . . the growing appreciation of the true character of God is the motivating principle, the dynamic element, the inherent inspiration toward social righteousness in the political group. . . . This in general was the Jewish philosophy of the state, and it comes down the centuries. We are not surprised, then, to see it definitely accepted and enunciated by the great prophets. Amos certainly makes God the center and heart of his social philosophy."⁷ Even the idea of God destroying Israel could fit within the traditional world view of the day. In support of this point, Kapelrud writes, "The ancient Near Eastern gods did not hesitate to destroy their own people. That idea is no invention of the Hebrew prophets, as is sometimes popularly believed."⁸ Howington sums up this discussion of Amos and tradition well: "Israel's moral laws were already on record. They clearly prescribed justice, mercy, humaneness, reverence for the Sabbath, sexual fidelity, honesty and truthfulness. . . . Amos sought to call the people back to a life of obedience."⁹

⁵ Peter Ackroyd, "Understanding Amos," *Learning for Living* 2, no. 1 (September 1962): 7.

⁶ Dearman, 136.

⁷ Thomas, 136.

⁸ Arvid S. Kapelrud, "God as Destroyer in the Preaching of Amos and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71, pt. 1 (March 1952): 35.

⁹ Howington, 411.

God: The Basis and Paradigm for Ethics

The center of Amos' theology and the basis for all his ethics is the concept of God. This is why Honeycutt says, "The knowledge of God is the necessary point of beginning in the book of Amos."¹⁰ Howington agrees with this and writes, "The roots of morality thus are found not in the nature or motives of man but in the character of God himself. Moreover, God's moral demands are imposed upon all men. He is the God of the nations."¹¹ I am concerned with Amos' theology since it determines his ethics. Therefore, it stands to reason that if God is the center of Amos' theology, it must also be the center of his ethics. In speaking of Amos and other prophets on this issue, Huey writes, ". . . their moral and ethical teachings were not derived from a rationalistic, philosophical system setting forth the highest good for man, but rather that their teachings were derived from their understanding of the nature of God."¹² The concept of God is also important for Amos because he sees God's character as a paradigm for the people who serve God. I will develop this more in discussions below on justice, righteousness, love, mercy, and forgiveness. Amos' view of God includes as Watts writes, "Amos thinks of God as truly infinite in his being and power. Amos can conceive of nothing greater."¹³ Furthermore, if as Howington says, "According to Hebrew religion, all property and goods ultimately belong to God the creator,"¹⁴ then ethical questions about the greedy "acquiring" more and more possessions takes on a whole new light.

¹⁰ Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 442.

¹¹ Howington, 412.

¹² Huey, 58.

¹³ Watts, 25.

¹⁴ Howington, 405.

Thomas writes, ". . . the righteousness of God and the reasonable cry for justice in man. These two great ideas are so complementary as to complete the circle of logical reasoning and of social thinking."¹⁵ Righteousness and justice are interrelated concepts for Amos. Howington remarks, "This strong conviction that the righteous God requires justice in human relationships is the basic principle moving through the book of Amos."¹⁶ Koch, in keeping with his concept of "metahistory"¹⁷ sees justice and righteousness as "efficacious auras" and "spheres of activity" which "not only surround the individual agent but also radiate out to the whole land, creating harmony between *society and nature*." He also sees justice and righteousness as providing the link between Amos' criticism of society (from the standpoint of justice) on the one hand and cult (from the standpoint of righteousness) on the other.¹⁸ God's own justice and righteousness are paradigms for human justice and righteousness. Hyatt writes, "He thought that Yahweh himself acts justly in his relations with men, and that he requires that men act justly in their relations with him and with one another. Injustice violates the fundamental idea that *all* of the Israelites constitute the people of Yahweh."¹⁹ Appendix B, my exegesis of Amos, will further illustrate the importance of the concepts of justice and righteousness. Asen suggests, "Amos' concept of justice can be seen most clearly in the oracles against

¹⁵ Thomas, 144.

¹⁶ Howington, 411.

¹⁷ Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, trans. Margaret Kohl, vol. 1 of 2 of *The Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 73.

¹⁸ Ibid., 56-60.

¹⁹ Hyatt, 346.

the nations. What he attacks is, in one word, injustice. This injustice is found in Israel (2:6-8) as well as among the nations.²⁰

Amos does not mention the covenant, but we would be wrong to conclude from this that the covenant concept was unimportant to Amos. Alger writes, "Nowhere does Amos make explicit reference to the covenant, but all his warnings and judgments depend upon his belief in the relationship existing between Israel and its God."²¹ Furthermore, in discussing the work of form critics, Alger adds, ". . . recent work on Amos 4:4-13 suggests that the whole passage is a call to repentance through a form of covenant renewal."²² The covenant is closely related to the idea of election, which I will discuss below. Ralph Smith makes this point by saying, "God had entered into a special relationship with Israel. . . . the covenant relationship."²³

Ralph Smith claims, "The beginning of the theology of Amos is to be found in the doctrine of election."²⁴ I have no desire to rank the importance of Amos' key doctrines, but, if I did, I would place election after the concept of God and the concepts of justice and righteousness. In any event, election is a key concept of Amos, especially since most people in his day misunderstood it. Concerning the misunderstood view of election, Howie writes, "Election by God was, according to the popular view, a privilege given to Israel and denied to the less deserving nations around."²⁵ Part of Amos' job as a prophet

²⁰ Bernhard Arthur Asen, *Amos' Faith: A Structural-Developmental Approach* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1983), 105.

²¹ Alger, 112.

²² Ibid., 114.

²³ Ralph Smith, 51.

²⁴ Ibid., 51.

²⁵ Carl G. Howie, "Expressly for Our Time," *Interpretation* 13, no. 3 (July 1959): 281.

of Yahweh was to challenge this perverted view of election. Howie explains, "Election by God is never alone to privilege, it is always to responsibility. . . . People had mistaken election for privilege and had not accepted their elected responsibility. . . . The choice of Israel was not that the world might serve Israel, but that Israel might serve the world."²⁶ Amos' mission included teaching people the true meaning of the very concepts they orally affirmed, but behaviorally denied. Concerning Amos on this issue, Watts says, "He dismissed their shallow version of an automatic salvation inherent in election by reminding them that election implies responsibility."²⁷

Amos did not preach to individuals. He preached to a community, a class of people, and a nation. Individualism is a post-Amos concept. The community was the focus of Hebrew thinking in Amos' day. God collectively blessed the people of God when they lived according to God's will and collectively punished them when they sinned. The story of Achan in Joshua 7:16-26 illustrates this point well. Kapelrud writes, "Amos accepts the ancient idea of collective responsibility, probably because he is of the opinion that sin has permeated the whole of society."²⁸ Kapelrud misses the point. Amos "accepts the ancient idea of collective responsibility" because it is the traditional Hebrew way of thinking from within which he operates. Honeycutt states best the bottom line: ". . . biblical revelation knows nothing of religious faith severed from communal life."²⁹

God is the paradigm of how God expects the people of God to demonstrate the concepts of love, mercy, and forgiveness. Howie says, "God demands justice because he

²⁶ Ibid., 281-2.

²⁷ Watts, 23.

²⁸ Kapelrud, 35.

²⁹ Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 447.

is just. Yahweh calls men to mercy because he is merciful. Israel, of all people, should show mercy to the weak, because Israel was once in bondage.³⁰ The God of love and mercy demands love and mercy in human relations. This is why, for the Hebrew community, Howington claims, "The fundamental pillars of the social order were justice, mercy, and love."³¹ The Israel with which Amos dealt, however, had abandoned love, mercy, and forgiveness in their relationships with each other. Their own actions, therefore, drive them away from God's love and mercy and headlong toward the inevitable wrath and judgment of God.³² It is not that God wants this to happen; it is rather that the people have chosen this path. Mitchell writes, "While, therefore, Jehovah, according to Amos, is above all holy, righteous, he is a God whose nature it is to love his creatures. This tender attribute shows itself in a variety of forms. . . . He is loath even at the last to punish them as they deserve."³³ Unfortunately for Israel, however, God's dislike of the idea of punishing did not keep it from happening.

God In and Of History

Honeycutt states, "For the prophets there was no concept of God as breaking into history; he was already in history."³⁴ Yahweh, for Amos, was the God of history and the God active in history. I gleaned from Howie the following four descriptions of Amos'

³⁰ Howie, 280.

³¹ Howington, 408.

³² This is not unlike the Jesus' teaching on forgiveness in Matthew 6:14-15. God's forgiveness of us is directly related to our forgiveness of others. To refuse to forgive others is to refuse to accept God's forgiveness of us.

³³ H. G. Mitchell, "The Idea of God in Amos," *Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis* (December 1887): 40-41.

³⁴ Roy L. Honeycutt, *Amos and His Message: An Expository Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), 31.

understanding of this God of history. First, "there is one God behind all of history." Second, God rules over the whole earth, which he created, not just the Israelite territories. Third, Amos never refers to Yahweh as "the God of Israel" because Yahweh is the God of the whole world, not just Israel. Fourth, God controls and reveals himself in natural and historical events.³⁵

It appears, at least in his oracles against the nations, that Amos understood and based some ethical standards on what we today would call natural law. He pointed out sins of foreign nations that were not violations of Israelite religious codes, but were violations of standards of right and wrong that everyone everywhere, religious or not, expected each other to know and uphold. This is why Kapelrud says, "The conclusion is then forced upon us that Amos--consciously or instinctively--may have held some ethical standards as being self-evident . . ."³⁶ All scholars do not agree with this, but I maintain that Amos held to what we would call natural law ethics which applied to all people. Furthermore, Amos held that the people of God, to whom Yahweh had revealed his will, had to answer to a higher ethical standard, which unaided human reason could not be discover.

Do not read the concepts of monotheism or monanthropology back into Amos. Amos reflects undeveloped approximations of these two ideas, but neither is a fully developed theological concept in the book of Amos. This is some of Koch's key points on this issue:

Now, the prophets were indisputably not the first to introduce the worship of a single God into Israel; and on the other hand, none of the prophets drew the

³⁵ Howie, 275-277.

³⁶ Kapelrud, 37.

conclusion that the numinous beings worshiped by other nations did not exist at all. . . . Yet it remains true that the fundamental principle of what was in practice monotheism--'I am Yahweh and there is no other god beside me'--was formulated by Deutero-Isaiah for the first time. . . . for critical prophecy, ultimately and before God, there is only a single, unified human race with a common responsibility for this world . . . monanthropology.³⁷

Koch correctly recognizes that Amos had no fully developed concept of monotheism. However, I believe Koch overstates the case for monanthropology. Amos did not conceive of foreign nations as being held to the same ethical standards as Israel, except for those "natural law" standards common to all humankind. Like monotheism, monanthropology is not a fully developed concept in Amos. Along these lines, Honeycutt writes, "The social identity of man is not limited to those within the covenant, however, and Amos makes clear that there is a universal understanding of the nature of man which permeates his thought."³⁸

Mitchell represents the way scholars make Amos into a proponent of monotheism. Mitchell says, "Jehovah is not merely the supreme, he is the only God. This is nowhere in the Book of Amos distinctly asserted, but it is plainly implied in the attributes which have already been found ascribed to him."³⁹ Obviously, I believe Mitchell is reading ideas back into Amos which Amos does not support. Watts offers a correction to Mitchell's bold claim. Watts writes, "The implications of God's universal purpose with mankind are not developed. Amos is content to contend that a positive declaration of God's election of Israel may not be turned to imply a negative lack of concern and relation to other peoples."⁴⁰ Still not wanting to give up the idea that Amos

³⁷ Koch, 13-14.

³⁸ Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 447.

³⁹ Mitchell, 37.

was a monotheist, Ralph Smith argues, "But Yahweh for Amos was not just the God of Israel. He was the God of the whole world. In fact the doctrine of election implies God's universal sovereignty. For if God were not sovereign over all nations, he would not have the right or the power to choose one nation."⁴¹ Against this, however, I maintain that Ralph Smith's modern and rationalistic argument itself would be an anachronistic approach to Amos' theology. Maybe the closest to monotheism and monanthropology that we can claim of Amos is as McCullough says, "We would appear to be on firmer ground if we conclude that Amos held to a God who had certain universalistic traits, but who at the same time had a special place in his affection and purpose for Israel."⁴²

God of the Poor and Powerless

One thing is certain in Amos. God does not approve of mistreating the poor and powerless. Stuhlmueller says, "Most of all, in Amos' eyes Yahweh was the God of the poor, as was the case when Yahweh delivered slaves out of Egypt and gave dispossessed people their own Promised Land."⁴³ It is more accurate to say that Yahweh is God of the rich as well as the poor. God is God of all people. It would be better to say that Yahweh is God *for* the poor. Stuhlmueller is correct, if "God of the poor" means God cares for the poor and powerless and holds accountable any who would take advantage of them. Asen remarks, "For Amos, right and wrong transcend nationalistic boundaries. The helpless, the oppressed, regardless of their nationality are Yahweh's concern. And the proud, the

⁴⁰ Watts, 22.

⁴¹ Smith, Ralph, 52.

⁴² McCullough, 253.

⁴³ Carroll Stuhlmueller, *Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk*, vol. 15 of *Collegeville Bible Commentary, Old Testament* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 9.

oppressors, regardless of their nationality, will be held accountable by Yahweh.”⁴⁴ There is something about the wrongness of mistreating the poor and powerless that makes the country, race, religion, gender, or age to which they belong irrelevant in God's eyes.

Ethics and Religion

It may be difficult to imagine, at first glance, that the Israelites saw no connection between religious practice and morality. However, observing how different the behavior of people today at church on Sunday is from the same people at work on Monday, reminds us that this may be a chronic human condition. Separating ethics from religion can be an easy trap in which to fall. Amos attacks the religious establishment of his day for being all talk and ceremony without any bearing on life outside the house of God. Some have interpreted Amos, therefore as preaching against outer ritualistic religion and for a genuine inner religion. However, as Martin-Achard explains, Amos does not preach an inner only religion; he calls for outer religion to match morality in society.⁴⁵ Howington writes, "Any discussion of the ethics of Amos must therefore begin with the admission that for the Hebrews ethics and religion were inextricably bound up together. . . . In fact, a religion devoid of social compassion, divorced from justice, destructive of moral idealism, becomes an immoral thing in itself. . . . It is more correct to say that Amos' hostility is directed not against worship and ritual *per se* but rather against their reduction to meaningless forms."⁴⁶ With all of Amos' attacks against cultic

⁴⁴ Asen, 106.

⁴⁵ Robert Martin-Achard, “The End of the People of God: A Commentary on the Book of Amos,” in *God's People in Crisis*, an *International Theological Commentary*, pp. 1-71 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 45.

⁴⁶ Howington, 405, 409-410.

activity, we should beware of concluding he thought it best to do away with it. Amos did not want to "throw the baby out with the bath water." Right worship is very important in the life of God's people. Howie explains, "God is always more concerned with a just and righteous life than he is with cultic activity, but worship rightfully used will constantly remind us of, not blind us to, what God wants."⁴⁷

Obligation and Allegiance

Part of Amos' concept of God is the idea that God demands obedience and allegiance. Howington, therefore, writes, "Essentially, the ethic of Amos is deontological--an ethic of obligation."⁴⁸ Logically, if God exists, if God is supremely powerful, if God can destroy and has destroyed disobedient people as easily as people can swat a fly, and if God has a way to make his will known, then the only response to God's demands that makes sense is obedience. However, people are notorious for not being logical creatures. Ackroyd provides a good summary on the ideas of obedience and justice:

The requirement of justice in human dealings which forms the obverse of this allegiance to Yahweh is expressed in Amos in the series of condemnations of particular aspects of social injustice. The particular stress is laid upon that failure to protect the unprotected which is so frequently indicated as central to Israel's law. The widow, the orphan, the poor--these are those to whom Israel owes especial responsibility; luxury, drunkenness, carelessness of the misfortunes of others, fraudulent commercial practice, the corruption of justice in the gates of the cities--these are the marks of a social order which has departed from the standards of conduct which belong to the religious tradition.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Howie, 281.

⁴⁸ Howington, 411.

⁴⁹ Ackroyd, 8.

A simple definition of sin is disobeying God. In Amos, however, sin goes deeper than that. Howie explains, "Sin, to Amos, was rebellion against God's goodness, in which belief he is in the main line of covenant tradition. . . . For Amos, sin was not primarily an act or a series of acts, it was a perverse condition of the heart which issued in actions."⁵⁰ In other words, what makes sin so bad is not that it hurts other people, even the poor and powerless, but that it hurts God. Liscal says, "The point is that the prophets denounced social injustice because it is sinful, because it dishonors God, not because it is contrary to the temporal common good."⁵¹ Not only the rich and powerful sinned, but as Kelly says, ". . . wealth easily makes people proud and guilty of other vices."⁵² Also, contrary to the views of some, like Martin-Achard,⁵³ the social sin arena was not the limit of Israel's guilt. Israel had sinned politically, socially, economically, and religiously. Evil has a way of infesting every nook and cranny of human activity.

Amos assumed that the sins of the people *caused* their destruction. Koch explains Amos' understanding of the link between morality and fate this way: "It is this *level of moral causality* given through the connection between action and outcome--between what one does and what happens to one in life--which more than anything else links together the first focus of Amos' thinking--criticism of the present--with the second focus--statements about the future."⁵⁴ Kapelrud says it more simply: "Man's moral conduct is decisive for his fate."⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Howie, 282-283.

⁵¹ Liscal, 2224-5.

⁵² Kelly, 2287.

⁵³ Martin-Achard, 21.

⁵⁴ Koch, 64-5.

The theological concepts of Amos mentioned above culminate, in a sense, in Amos' conclusion of the inevitability of God's judgment against and punishment of Israel. God's own chosen people had violated the ancient covenant and disobeyed God's will through blatant disregard for justice, righteousness, and mercy, especially with the poor and powerless. The God who acts in history has condemned the whole community for its sins and pronounced judgment. In this direction, Kapelrud writes, "Yahweh's doom had to come because the people had turned away from their god. . . . Because the ethical standards are seen as the demands of Yahweh the break with them can only be seen as a break with Yahweh."⁵⁶ Even though Yahweh is a God of love and mercy, it is true that, as Hyatt observes, ". . . there is a limit beyond which the forgiveness and mercy of God cannot go, if men persist in rebellion against him and his demands."⁵⁷ The irony of it all is that the troubles began when the nation entered a period of "good times," when religion became popular and the economy was booming. Honeycutt notes this irony and writes, "It was a rather strange anomaly that the very corruption of Israelite society could be traced, first, to current religious structures and, second, to the material prosperity which the ancient Hebrew interpreted as a sign of divine favor."⁵⁸ There probably is a lesson for us in here somewhere.

⁵⁵ Kapelrud, 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁷ Hyatt, 346.

⁵⁸ Honeycutt, *Amos and His Message: An Expository Commentary*, 5.

CHAPTER 5

THE PERSON AND BOOK OF AMOS

Amos is not a book on ethics. On the issue of ethics Hammershaimb explains, ". . . the book of Amos is not arranged on a consistent and systematic plan."¹ Amos is, therefore, not a treatise on ethics nor an ethical rule book, but still, as Huey states, "No adjective has been used more frequently to describe the message . . . than the word 'ethical'."² Although Amos is not a book on ethics, it is, nevertheless, a very ethical book. As McCullough points out, "Amos was primarily concerned with simple moral values. . ."³

Most scholars agree that Amos was from Tekoa in Judah and was either a shepherd or a manager or owner of shepherds. Rosenbaum⁴ and Hammershaimb⁵ argue convincingly that Amos was not a simple uneducated shepherd. This is deduced mainly from translating the word in Amos 1:1, בְּנֵקְדִים, as "among the sheep breeders" based on the meaning of the only other place in scripture that נֵכֶר is used (2 Kings 3:4), where it refers to a king as a sheep breeder. The debate over Tekoa is whether it refers to a Tekoa

¹ Erling Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, trans. John Sturdy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 14.

² Huey, 57.

³ McCullough, 252.

⁴ Stanely N. Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel: A New Interpretation* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990), 3.

⁵ Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, 12.

in Judah or a Tekoa in Galilee. Billy Smith and most scholars argue this Tekoa is the one in Judah.⁶ Even so, the debate continues as to what Amos' relationship was to this Tekoa. Was he born there but living somewhere else? Was he from another place but moved there and was living there at the time of his prophetic calling? Did he merely do business there? Is that where he went after being kicked out of Israel? All answers to these questions are purely speculative. A minority view holds that Amos was not even from Judah. Rosenbaum holds this view and many more minority opinions. He writes:

Integrating insights from sociology, history, and philology, I propose further that Amos

1. had entree into Samarian society on levels no Southerner, much less an itinerant shepherd, could have had;
2. had sufficient social standing to command an audience; and
3. wrote or was recorded in a dialect of Hebrew peculiar to the Northern Kingdom.⁷

Most commentators, but not all, agree with McKeating that Amos prophesied for a short time.⁸ Amos' prophetic ministry appears to have been rather short, probably a year (during the year that came two years before "the earthquake"--Amos 1:1) or less. This is the consensus among scholars. Auld states, "It is widely held first of all that his role in Israel's stage was a brief one."⁹

Not only did Amos prophesy, but his prophecies were fulfilled within a few decades of his preaching. Mays notes, "In the last quarter of the eighth century the word became history. The kingdom of Israel passed through four decades of crises, defeats,

⁶Billy Smith, 26, 37.

⁷Rosenbaum, 3, 5.

⁸McKeating, 3

⁹Auld, 12.

and assassinations on the way to the abyss, and then was swallowed up by the Assyrian Empire. Amos spoke true."¹⁰

There is no specific call narrative in Amos. The closest we come to a call in Amos is the account of the five visions. Concerning the visions, von Rad says, "All that Amos learned in his visions was that Yahweh would no longer forgive his people."¹¹ Burdened with the terrible weight of this knowledge, how could Amos have kept quiet, if he cared at all for the people?

As I alluded in chapter four, Amos never challenged orthodox theology. He challenged the popular heretical interpretation of that theology. Williams writes, "Amos draws his message from the same theological foundation as his congregation: the problem was the interpretation and application of that theological heritage."¹² Even though he rocked the boat of popular religious faith and practice, Amos, the "lone ranger" prophet, was actually the traditional one. It was everyone else, not Amos, who had drifted away from tradition.

Hans Walter Wolff argues convincingly for a close connection between Amos and wisdom literature. Wolff identifies wisdom forms in Amos to be the chains of questions, woe-cries, numerical sequences, antithetical parallelisms, antithetical word-pairs, and the use of proverb-like phrases. Wolff then argues these forms are only in genuine wisdom texts, families and clans, oral tradition materials, clan ethos, family instruction, or proverbs. Wolff sees this as evidence against the dependence of Amos on cult ideology

¹⁰ James Luther Mays, *Amos* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 1.

¹¹ von Rad, 105.

¹² Williams, 393.

and concerns.¹³

Some have been so much absorbed with Amos' social concern that they impose undue limits on their assessment of the moral evils Amos meant to confront. Blenkinsopp, for instance, says, "It is still necessary to insist that for the prophets the sphere of morality is the social and political domain, and therefore includes what for us falls under international law, social justice, and civil rights. Amos is much less concerned than Hosea with forms of worship--he mentions apostate cults only once (8:14)--and much more concerned to excoriate a violent, oppressive, and exploitative society."¹⁴ Actually, Amos mentions or refers to forms of worship many times, as my next quotation from Auld will show. Amos does not separate social from worship concerns so neatly; they are interrelated.

Auld recognizes that Amos does address cultic concerns, but draws the wrong conclusion. Auld writes, "The principal portions concerned with social matters are: Amos 2.6-8; 3.9-11, 13-15; 4.1-3; 5.7, 10-13; 6.1-8, 11-12; 8.4-7 . . . Then cultic issues are to the fore in Amos 4.4-5; 5.4-6, 14-15, 21-27; and possibly 8.9-10 as well; but social issues are never far distant from these texts."¹⁵ Several passages Auld says are primarily concerned with social matters are actually concerned with cultic issues. For example, Amos 3:14 refers to worship at Bethel; Amos 6:1-8 possibly refers to a pagan religious festival that focuses on getting drunk (I admit this is debatable); and Amos 8:4-7 refers to

¹³ Hans Walter Wolff, *Amos the Prophet: The Man and His Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 13-86.

¹⁴ Blenkinsopp, 96.

¹⁵ Auld, 60.

attitudes toward worship. Auld's conclusion, therefore, is not only incorrect, but backwards. In Amos, religious issues are never far from social ones.

The best assessment of the moral evils which Amos confronts is, as Howington says, "He confronted the nation's moral evils along four different fronts: economic, political, social, and religious."¹⁶ Honeycutt's opinion, that "Amos condemns those actions of man which ignore one's responsibility toward other men,"¹⁷ does not contradict Howington's assessment. Amos is concerned with people's economic, political, social, and religious responsibility toward others. The sad truth about Amos' preaching is, as Ralph Smith says, "Amos was always talking about justice and righteousness, about truth and goodness. But all indications are that Israel did not understand this language anymore."¹⁸

Some, a minority, maintain that Amos was against religious rituals and ceremonies. Blenkinsopp argues against this claim by interpreting Amos' attack to be against the worshipers, not the worship. He writes, "Yet it is simply inconceivable that Amos rejected worship as such in favor of a purely spiritual and ethical religion. The point is rather that for his contemporaries, as he believed, worship had become a way of validating their own values and assumptions."¹⁹ Williams argues against the anti-cult claim by using textual evidence. He states, "That Amos did not negate the cultus wholly is evidenced by his own dependence upon the theological attitude fostered in these centers of worship. Inserted into the book of Amos are three hymn fragments which owe

¹⁶ Howington, 405.

¹⁷ Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 448.

¹⁸ Ralph Smith, 53.

¹⁹ Blenkinsopp, 95.

their origin to the organized worship of Israel."²⁰

Howie, in agreement with Blenkinsopp and Williams, defines the problem with worship in Amos' day. He says, "Apparently there was no conscious relationship between what happened in cultic practice, and what happened in the common life."²¹ Williams agrees and states, "Amos was protesting a worship which did not affect man's relationship with his God or with his fellow man: the degenerate moral climate of the citizens of the Northern Kingdom was a living testimony to the failure of the religion of Israel."²²

Amos, while being founded in tradition, turns some traditional and popular ideas on their heads. Blenkinsopp notes that Amos reverses two traditional ways of thinking. The first image Amos reverses is the "day of Yahweh." Popular opinion was that the day of Yahweh would be a day of victory for Israel and destruction of Israel's enemies. Amos says that the "day of Yahweh," will be the destruction of Israel. The second idea Amos reverses is that worship is good and acceptable to God. Amos says that, for the Israelites in that day, worship itself had become a sin.²³

Amos' message focuses on the doom of Israel and the sins that made that doom inevitable. Williams says that Amos' certainty that Israel was doomed was the new, unheard of before, aspect of Amos' message.²⁴ Most scholars recognize that Amos' basic message was God is going to destroy Israel. Amos also explains the reason for Israel's

²⁰ Williams, 396.

²¹ Howie, 279.

²² Williams, 395.

²³ Blenkinsopp, 94-95.

²⁴ Williams, 399.

inevitable doom. That reason is sin, especially the sins of and within the community. McCullough writes, "Thus the sins he mentioned most frequently were injustice, violence, robbery, and the ill-treatment of the poor."²⁵ The oppression of the poor and powerless stands out among Amos' concerns. Mays claims, "The crucial manifestation of evil in Israel is the oppression of the weak."²⁶ Lest we overstate the case of Amos against the rich and powerful, we need to see that, as Amos attacked worshipers and not worship itself, likewise, Amos attacks the greedy rich and not wealth itself. Along these lines, Howington states, "His message contained no condemnation of affluence as such. Nor did he offer a solution for the economic disparities which he noted. But he did condemn dishonest forms of acquisition, the merciless exploitation of the poor, and abusive use of wealth."²⁷

Scholars disagree on how to label Amos. They offer a variety of labels that they argue best explain what type of prophet Amos was. To approach this issue, I want to set the stage with the current cacophony of Amos labels. I will simply list a variety of quotations from several scholars (Alger, Williams, McKeating, Vawter, Honeycutt, Dearman). Then, I will offer a better one, in my opinion.

The prophets were not however revolutionaries trying to overturn the established order but moralists, full of sympathy for the poor, who defended the poor with the fervour of preachers.²⁸

... the eighth-century prophets are to be regarded more correctly as "reformers," attempting to bring Israel back to her theological heritage which was grounded in the Mosaic covenant. . . . Amos is one of the first of these "reformers" . . . Amos

²⁵ McCullough, 252.

²⁶ Mays, 10.

²⁷ Howington, 405.

²⁸ Alger, 111.

must not be viewed as a "theological revolutionary."²⁹

He is first and foremost a man of God. He is a religious visionary. . . . Even his condemnations are mainly focused on one area of life, on social justice. He shows little interest in purely religious offences.³⁰

Amos thus becomes the first of Israel's social prophets.³¹

. . . the prophets were reformers to a far greater degree than they were innovators. . . . Amos judged the present superficiality of Israel against the background of a prior revelation of the LORD, . . . He offered reformation, not revolution, as the wisest course of action for Israel to follow.³²

Neither Harnack nor Rauschenbusch seem aware that the preexilic prophets were not primarily reformers; rather announcements of judgment are the prevalent forms of speech and few, if any, social programs are advocated.³³

The claims, therefore run from Amos being a moralist, religious visionary, bearer of tradition, reformer, or social prophet to Amos not being a revolutionary, innovator, or reformer. This sounds fairly confusing. Some sound points made by the group of scholars above, however, help to settle the issue. First, Amos did not advocate any social, religious, political, or economic programs to cure Israel's evils. Second, Amos primarily acted the part of a preacher who simply proclaimed God's word and reminded the people of the truths of their own traditional religious beliefs. Therefore, for me, the label "preacher" seems to fit Amos better than other suggestions. Furthermore, Amos fits best the kind of preacher we may call a "revivalist." Amos' "old-time religion" message attempted to revive faith forgotten and bring back to life and remembrance the truths of God that the Israelites had moth-balled into the past. This old faith also brought with it

²⁹ Williams, 393, 394.

³⁰ McKeating, 4, 23.

³¹ Vawter, 21.

³² Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 453.

³³ Dearman, 135.

the truth that God will judge Israel for its sins. In this light, what Amos, in effect, preached was, "Wake up, people, you are all going to die."

CHAPTER 6

ETHICAL APPLICATIONS OF AMOS

Christian ethicists today commonly hold that the Bible speaks to Christian ethics at one of four levels: rules, principles, paradigms, or theological concepts (some may call this the world view or symbolic level). My purpose in this chapter is to propose how Amos speaks to ethics today at each of these four levels.

Honeycutt writes, "The person who goes to the Bible generally, or to Amos more specifically, in search of clearly isolated declarations concerning present issues will often be greatly disappointed. What one will find is the record of a moving experience on the part of the prophet (and the people) with the LORD, an experience in which they hammered out on the anvil of their own crises the will of God for their time. As one shares personally in this living encounter, the LORD will so infill one's life that the revelation of God for our time can then be beaten out on the anvil of our own crises."¹ Honeycutt continues, "We cannot find a finely worked out ethical blueprint, applicable for every age in Amos, or in the Bible."² Realizing that Amos does not give us any ethical system, this endeavor will require some use of the imagination. First, I will discuss my impression of Amos in general terms; then, I will address the ethics of Amos at the levels of rules, principles, paradigms, and theological concepts.

¹ Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 442.

² Ibid., 443.

General Impressions of Amos

The issue of Amos is not one of the rich versus the poor, but the powerful versus the powerless. It is a power issue, not a money issue. Some were without power, others had power taken away and were reduced to poverty (powerlessness). This destroyed their dignity and value as persons of God. Thorogood writes, "It is plain that the teaching of Amos, with his concern about the rich and the poor, is of great importance for us today. He reminds us that the struggle to make a just society is a *religious* matter."³

The obvious objection to Amos being applicable to ethics today is that Amos' world is so different from our world that it has no modern voice. Honeycutt, however states, "There are elements of both continuity and discontinuity between the times of Amos and our own generation."⁴ I maintain that even though times have changed a great deal, people have changed very little. Human beings practice the same selfishness, greed, and immorality today as they did thousands of years ago. Huey says, ". . . contemporary theological discussion centers around the changing concept of ethical standards. . . . However, Amos would not have felt at home with the modern theologians and ethicists who proclaim what has been variously called the new morality, situation ethics, or contextual ethics. . . . Amos insisted that absolute standards of morality do exist."⁵ People have not changed. Hyatt writes,

"There are still men of wealth and power who oppress the poor, both within the law and outside the law. There are still merchants who give scant measure and charge inflated prices. . . . Are there not still courts in which one kind of 'justice' is given to the wealthy and another to the poor, or in which 'justice' is based upon the color of the skin or the social standing of the defendant? There are still many who think

³Bernard Thorogood, *A Guide to the Book of Amos* (London: S. P. C. K., 1971), 50.

⁴Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 446.

⁵Huey, 60, 61.

of religion largely, if not exclusively, in terms of individual salvation, or in terms of formal observances, rather than in terms of God's demands for social justice and personal righteousness."⁶

Honeycutt draws similar conclusions about this matter. He says, "Inordinate luxury in the face of unprecedented poverty is an offense in the sight of God, whether in the seventh century B.C. or the twentieth century."⁷ The bottom line is as Huey suggests, ". . . many, if not all, of the sins practiced in his day are also practiced now."⁸

We are in just as much need of renewal and revival as Israel was in Amos' day. Honeycutt explains, "Reformation and renewal are desperately needed within every aspect of the church, in every generation. But we do not need a revolution which will abandon the heart of the biblical revelation concerning the nature and character of God; the task of the individual Christian; and the ministry of the church, even the institutional aspect of the church."⁹ It is hard to read Amos' judgment against the sins of the people of his day and not feel ourselves condemned as we flip channels from our very own easy chairs.

Amos contains a number of vices and virtues that generally fit into the category of natural law ethics. Some obvious vices in Amos include extortion, hypocrisy, corruption, sexual immorality, cheating, exploitation, drunkenness, self-indulgence, oppression, inhumane treatment of others, breaking a promise (treaty), uncontrolled anger, merciless killing, and mass murder. Some obvious virtues in Amos include justice, mercy, compassion, and faithful responsibility. Most people will agree that these vices and

⁶Hyatt, 346, 347.

⁷Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 449.

⁸Huey, 60.

⁹Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 454.

virtues are valid for us today. The important application of Amos to ethics today, however, is not at the simple level of vices and virtues.

The Level of Rules

We cannot apply Amos at the rule level since he does not give rules for us to live by. The paradigm or theological concept level is the most appropriate use of Amos for ethics today. Amos contains some applicable principles, but they usually are derivatives of paradigms or theological concepts.

The Level of Principles

Justice is a dominant concept in Amos and operates at the principle and paradigm levels of ethics. What Amos has to say to us today about the principle of justice applies to social, economical, and political ethics. God's expectation, and demand, is for us to be just and fair in our relations with each other. Concerning social ethics, Huey writes, "Amos, especially, of all the Old Testament prophets, is associated with social justice. In no uncertain terms he lashed out at the callousness of the rich toward the poor. . . . Social injustice is the point at which Amos speaks most devastatingly to the present age."¹⁰ Concerning business ethics, Honeycutt states, "Amos clearly indicated that men are responsible before God for the dealings they have with one another in business, as in other areas of society."¹¹ What we call "the justice system" today actually has to do with only a part of what God considers justice, specifically the area of political justice. The poor and powerless should be treated fairly in the courts of the land. As long as being rich is an advantage in our judicial system, the principle of justice is violated.

¹⁰ Huey, 63-64.

¹¹ Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 449.

The Level of Paradigms

God is the ultimate paradigm for all ethics in Amos. For example, we are to be merciful because God is merciful, and we are to be merciful in the way that God has demonstrated his mercy among us. I leave the development of the implications of the "character of God" paradigm open to discussion. However, I think the primary applications must be in the area of justice for all (concern for the powerless according to the liberation paradigm), mercy and compassion, forgiveness, and righteousness (a righteousness in which religion and morality are one).

Amos also serves as a paradigm for ministers today. Honeycutt writes, "To every prophet of every generation, the brevity of Amos' ministry emphasizes the fact that it is not so much the length of service, as it is what is done with the time that one has to utilize for God, that is of most significance in life."¹² Furthermore, Huey adds, "Amos is relevant also in that he demonstrates the fact that one who denounces the sins of his time often finds himself standing alone."¹³ The ones who dare to speak for God today must speak God's Word and God's truth regardless of the cost.

As the book of Amos, and other prophecies as well, generates from times of world crises, it serves as a paradigm for approaching modern world crises with cold soberness and sincere assessment before doing something we will regret later. It calls us to evaluate whether our motives for acting on the global level are justice or greed, mercy or exploitation. John Smith, felt this influence of Amos in the decision-making time just before the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902). Writing before the war in an article

¹² Honeycutt, *Amos and His Message: An Expository Commentary*, 13.

¹³ Huey, 62.

on Amos, he states, "In this solemn hour, when this nation is in the crisis of a great decision, I open the exposition of a book that speaks to a nation."¹⁴

The necessity of Christians getting involved in social, economical, political, and religious justice issues finds its basis in another ethical paradigm of Amos. Huey says, ". . . the example of Amos teaches that the man of God must involve himself in the burning social and moral problems of his day. . . . He cannot ignore the four great social issues of the day--war, racism, poverty, and moral disintegration."¹⁵ Huey continues, "Unfortunate has been the church's tendency throughout history to defend the status quo, to be slow to speak out on matters of social injustice, to be a follower and not a leader in demanding social reform."¹⁶

I have one final word about Amos as a paradigm for ethics. As Israel was first a religious community, and only secondarily a nation, the primary application of Amos today is to the church, not America or society in general. Amos cared about the correct worship of God within a religious community. America is not comparable with Israel; America is not a religious community. The church today is comparable with Israel. If Christians primarily practiced justice and righteousness within the church, that alone would be enough to change the world as we know it.

The Level of Theological Concepts

Concerning the doctrine of election, Honeycutt writes, "Amos insists that man is not only responsible for others, but that action toward others is to be just, equitable,

¹⁴ John Smith, 83.

¹⁵ Huey, 62.

¹⁶ Ibid., 66.

determined in the light of the will of God.¹⁷ Being chosen by God carries with it responsibility toward others. To answer Cain's question, we *are* our brother's keeper. The New Testament develops the concept of election to include that Christians are a "priesthood of believers." Just as in Amos' day, this privilege carries with it responsibility. The New Testament and Amos agree here. Being a kingdom of priests or an elect people is not so much a statement of our value or status as a statement of our servitude. Our duty is to minister to and serve others.

The God of Amos demands allegiance and obedience. The choice between religion and ethics does not exist. There is no option; ethics and religion are inseparable. Honeycutt writes, "Ethical and moral concern are not, therefore, matters of indifference to the one who truly knows the LORD. They are not optional choices but issues of vital concern."¹⁸ Quite shockingly, the Israelites of Amos' day thought they could separate religious practice from relationship with God. Huey observes, ". . . their religion was only formal and ritualistic, for they had no personal relationship with God."¹⁹ Huey continues, "The message of Amos may be applied in this day to a society in which 'religion never had it better' . . ."²⁰ Amos teaches us that worship and real life should be mirrors of each other, not two separate realities.

Amos teaches us to remember the good things that God has done for us in the past. This applies both to worship and personal meditation. One of the functions of worship is to re-member and re-mind (hyphens are intentional) us of what God has done

¹⁷ Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," 449.

¹⁸ Ibid., 450.

¹⁹ Huey, 64.

²⁰ Ibid.

for us. It is a call never to forget that God has always been with his people and will continue be with his people. This paradigm of remembering God's great deeds of the past teaches us the importance of right worship and regular Bible study. Amos clearly shows the results of a people who forget God.

Just as we should remember God's great deeds of the past, we should also never forget God's past punishments of sin. In other words, Amos teaches us the value of learning from our mistakes instead of repeating them. Because Amos did not think individualistically, but collectively, he saw God's punishment as directed against the whole community. Amos believed that the people's morality determined their fate. Amos' conception, and the Old Testament conception in general, was that the whole community got punished for their corporate sins. Do we believe this anymore? It seems to me that our individualistic way of thinking has obliterated our ability to acknowledge our collective responsibility. Is it possible that God still holds his people collectively responsible for their behavior, or is this an outdated way of thinking? In any event, do we learn from God's chastisements or do we instead interpret such things now as "misfortune"?

Another lesson we can learn from Amos is that people should look for God more and look for churches less. People who move to a new area often say, "We have been looking for a church we like, but we have not found one yet." What is going on here? I realize this may be an issue of hunting for denominational flavor that suits, but I wonder if it points to a problem that also existed in Amos' day. What people should seek first is God himself, not places of worship. Maybe it is more theologically correct that we do

not find God in this Baptist church or that Presbyterian church so much as we find God working in the world on the behalf of the poor and powerless and striving for true justice and fairness in human dealings. It is a matter of focus. First, seek God and what is good. After that, other things will fall perspectively into place.

Finally, if as Amos maintains, God is concerned with the welfare of the powerless and needy, then, should we not be so concerned, if we are to be involved with, rather than against, God in the activities of the world.? If God is on the side of the poor and needy, but we are not, then we are not with God, but against God. The questions we should ask are "Where is God's concern focused in our present age?" and "Where is God at work in our world today?" It stands to reason that the people of God should be working with and concerned about the same issues as God. Otherwise, we appear not to be the people of God at all.

CHAPTER 7

MILITARY ETHICS

Problems

Speaking of the rise of immorality in the military during and following Vietnam, Gabriel explains that the military experienced a "crisis of conscience."¹ Although today's Army has changed organizationally since the Vietnam era, the people who make up today's Army still have some of the same moral problems. The ethical problems, as I see them today, fit well under one of three categories: dishonesty, lack of integrity, and the inability to resolve military ethics in tension with other ethics.

Dishonesty: A Virtue

The military environment, at times, has encouraged soldiers to think of dishonesty almost as a virtue. Axinn writes, "If failing to carry out a mission perfectly is an absolute fear, then dishonesty becomes a lesser danger."² I think that leaders, not the military itself, are responsible for creating an environment that breeds dishonesty. In any event, an environment that leads to immoral acts is wrong. Either the leaders or the system itself must ensure that soldiers see honesty as a virtue and dishonesty as a vice. I do not

¹ Richard A. Gabriel, *To Serve With Honor: A Treatise on Military Ethics and the Way of the Soldier* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 4.

² Sidney Axinn, *A Moral Military* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 42.

see how any profession could consider itself ethical if it values honesty less than reporting successful mission accomplishment to the boss.

Gabriel noticed that the military has failed to train soldiers in moral reasoning and instead fosters a "can do" attitude.³ To this day, there is still a battalion in the Army that has as its slogan, "Can Do." This slogan is an example of institutional pressure toward dishonesty. If leaders do not want to hear the truth, which may be, "we cannot do this," then they leave themselves open to disaster, not to mention unnecessary loss of life. Optimism may be preferable to pessimism, but ultimately, even the most optimistic must also be realistic. If the professional environment will only accept "can do" in response to mission discussions, then lying becomes necessary, followed by cheating, stealing, or any other unethical means to perform the mission or make the mission seem like a success when it really is not.

Johnson describes the "loyalty syndrome" as an environment in which what the boss wants or wants to hear or see becomes the basis for what is moral. This makes people reluctant to tell the truth. Johnson adds that leaders must be secure enough to refuse yes-men.⁴ I would think that in the military, of all places, what leaders would want to hear would be the absolute truth. Anything less would give the leader a false and potentially dangerous impression of his or her unit and situation. The problem is that, whenever a leader explodes and verbally assaults a bearer of bad news, the implied message to other bearers of news is that they had better lie if they do not want to

³ Gabriel, 14.

⁴ Kermit D. Johnson, "Ethical Issues of Military Leadership," in *The Parameters of Military Ethics*, ed. Lloyd J. Matthews and Dale E. Brown (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1989), 75.

experience the irrational wrath of their boss. This is not only bad ethics and poor leadership, but it is also immature.

Johnson also mentions "worry over image" as a condition that promotes dishonesty. This institutional pressure leads soldiers to bury their interest in the truth under the unfortunately more valuable interest over image.⁵ I think these examples are enough to show the need for honesty in the military. If the military would rediscover the benefit of honesty and its commitment to it, it would improve both its image and its mission capability.

Integrity Lost

People once considered integrity part of the image of the professional soldier. This is not true anymore. The military lost integrity when dishonesty replaced honesty as a value. In almost the same words as Johnson uses to describe the "loyalty syndrome," Wakin writes, "There are high-ranking officers who do not take bad news well, so members of their staffs frequently tell their bosses just what they want to hear."⁶ Wakin observed this to be true especially following the Vietnam era. Such dishonesty leads to the breakdown of personal integrity. It may be an exaggeration, but some may be more afraid of their boss than they are of the public or even the enemy on the battlefield. In this environment, integrity becomes meaningless.

Gabriel notes, "With the appointment of Robert McNamara as secretary of defense, the U.S. military became increasingly bureaucratized."⁷ Gabriel attributes the

⁵Ibid., 76.

⁶Malham M. Wakin, "The Ethics of Leadership," in *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, ed. Malham M. Wakin (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1979), 209.

⁷Gabriel, 11.

military's being forced to adopt secular business ethics, or lack of it, to the ethical problems the military experienced during and after Vietnam. The military profession is not a corporation. It is not profit-driven. Gabriel sees careerism, the drive for success, and the zero defects mentality as derivatives of this business ethics.

According to Gabriel, when the military began to function like a business corporation, it moved from leadership to management and led to careerism.⁸ The shift from leaders being leaders to leaders to being managers may work well in a business, but it spells disaster to soldiers on the battlefield. People expect a business executive to work to advance his or her career. A military leader, on the other hand, cannot stoop to using soldiers for career enhancement (and business executives should not do so either). The military mission is too crucial to national defense. The need in the military is for leaders to set the example, to sacrifice their own selfish desires for the good of the unit and the nation.

Johnson describes "the drive for success" as the "the masochistic whip," the "pressure" to succeed at all costs.⁹ Of course, we want a military that can succeed on the battlefield. An army that cannot win is useless for defense. We need to differentiate the need to succeed militarily in war from the desire to succeed financially, socially, and organizationally in peace time. When we measure success by passing inspections, and leaders choose to steal parts from other vehicles and motor pools to make themselves look good and thus enhance their own success, then we sacrifice personal integrity to the god of success.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Johnson, 76.

Gabriel describes how the "drive for success" in the military began to replace military ethics and values with business ones. One such business value that threatens honesty and integrity is "zero defects."¹⁰ This zero defects mentality places tremendous strain on soldiers always to perform perfectly. When we call a 99 percent success rate failure, we force soldiers to choose between shame and dishonest means to cover up the flaws. Zero defects is not only unrealistic, it is impossible. This mentality and system rewards liars who have no integrity and report that they have achieved 100 percent of the standard, while actually only having achieved 70 percent, and punishes the honest, hard working soldier for having integrity and outperforming the other by achieving 90 percent of the standard, but failing dishonestly to report complete success.

Ethics in Tension

Taylor writes, "War consists largely of acts that would be criminal if performed in time of peace--killing, wounding, kidnapping, destroying or carrying off other people's property."¹¹ The ethics of the military in war cannot escape the tension with ethics of the military in times of peace and with ethics in general. I maintain that a Christian soldier must act in combat as a Christian and in peace time as a Christian. This means a Christian in the military needs to think ethically about war before war happens to avoid as much unnecessary moral confusion as possible. Also, it means a Christian must think ethically about the proper way to be a soldier in peace time. The problem, it seems to me, is that, since war seems to follow different ethical rules, many think the military is

¹⁰ Gabriel, 12.

¹¹ Telford Taylor, "War Crimes," in *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, ed. Malham M. Wakin (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1979), 415.

under an ethical system separate from Christian ethics or any other religious ethics. In combat and certain military posts overseas, soldiers talk about what they will do when they get back to the "real world." I heard this kind of talk while I was stationed in Korea a few years ago. They no longer think of where they are as the real world, and, therefore, they fall into the trap of thinking that the ethics of the "real world" do not apply to them. This line of thinking leads to the sort of atrocities we attribute to Vietnam and Nazi Germany.

Hartle argues that a soldier must make ethical decisions "partially differentiated." The soldier must stand outside himself or herself to "judge" what to do. The soldier must coldly apply military ethics to the situation. Hartle admits that the soldier cannot abandon the core societal values, because society will hold the soldier accountable, but the soldier must not allow other ethical systems to influence his or her judgment.¹² Hartle fails to give weight to Christian values. This is astonishing to me, since most of the soldiers in the U.S. military claim to be Christians. He gives societal values some weight, but not Christian ones. Since most of society claim to hold religious values, I would think Hartle could not justify dismissing them so easily. As I see it, a Christian soldier is always bound to Christian ethics. The reason I say this is because I cannot see how a soldier could claim to be a part time Christian. Being a Christian is a lifelong and eternal choice.

Christopher also notices the tension the soldier experiences between military ethics and ethics of society. He writes, "Soldiers are judged twice. They are judged

¹² Anthony E. Hartle, *Moral Issues in Military Decision Making* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 100-128.

based on the compatibility of their actions with the common good of their unit or nation; this is an assessment of how well they perform the duties inherent in their role as combatant; but also, and even more importantly, they are judged based on the compatibility of their actions with universal moral truths. Thus soldiers have a moral responsibility to disobey orders--*even legal orders*--when they prescribe immoral acts.¹³ That the world held German soldiers accountable after the war for immoral acts that they committed while following legal orders of their Nazi superiors shows the truth of Christopher's claim. The shortcoming of Christopher's analysis is that he left out the third way soldiers are judged. Christian soldiers, who make up most of the U.S. Army, are judged by God and the standards of Christian ethics. In fact, this judgment is the only one which *ultimately* matters.

Christopher claims that, "Just as officers ought not to fight when the President decides against the use of force, they ought not to refuse to fight when the President orders them to. . . The fact is that we often never know objectively and with any degree of certainty which side in a war is just, even in retrospect. . . Consider a highly publicized murder trial, for example: . . . In many cases, we will never know for certain whether the accused did it or not, but our society accepts the verdict of the jury as long as the proper formal procedures were followed."¹⁴ The fear is that, if we allow soldiers to decide if a war is just, we open the door to the possibility that we would not have a responsive military force in a time of real and immediate danger. The claim is that national security

¹³ Paul Christopher, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction to Legal and Moral Issues* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 155.

¹⁴ Paul Christopher, "Unjust War and Moral Obligation: What Should Officers Do?", *Parameters* (Autumn 1995): 7.

requires soldiers to leave questions about the justness of war to someone else. This makes practical sense, but there is a limit to this. If a war is unjust, and therefore immoral, then Christians must refuse to participate. The issue is whether soldiers or the average citizen can make this judgment when much of the information upon which we base judgments may not be public knowledge. Another issue is trust. Can we blindly trust that, in America, our leaders would never mislead us on such an important matter? I think, as a minimum, what we need to do is, before sending soldiers off to war, we should tell them why the war is just. Soldiers are not machines. They are human beings, and many are Christians, and they deserve knowing not just that they must fight, but also why they must fight. I do not think this consideration will affect our military responsiveness. I do think, however, this principle would serve the military well in peace time as well as war. Just telling soldiers to do a mission may work, but telling soldiers the reason the mission is important probably would work even better. It would give soldiers a sense of purpose, show that they are valued as persons, and avoid defensive reactions to someone they might otherwise perceive as uncaring and selfishly demanding.

Walzer, like Hartle and Christopher, saw a tension between military ethics and societal ethics. Walzer describes the tension as between a hierarchical morality, up and down the chain of command and a non-hierarchical morality, responsibility outward to society.¹⁵ Also, like Hartle and Christopher, Walzer omits the most important ethical influence on most soldiers today--Christian ethics.

¹⁵ Michael Walzer, "Two Kinds of Military Responsibility," in *The Parameters of Military Ethics*, ed. Lloyd J. Matthews and Dale E. Brown (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1989), 67-76.

Relativism is an ethical system in conflict with both Christian ethics and military ethics. Johnson denounces the popular "ethical relativism" of many of the younger soldiers today. He says that if everything is relative, there is no basis to make ethical decisions at all.¹⁶ Nard also sees relativism as a problem among some soldiers today and shows that it is incompatible with the military system. He writes, ". . . some people in the military do not believe what they profess about some ethical concepts relevant to their profession . . ."¹⁷ He says this is especially true with those who hold to relativism. In spite of their claim that everything is relative, Nard says that they do value some things above others. True relativism would mean that even extremely evil acts against the helpless are not inherently wrong, just unacceptable in most cultures. Nard claims that this position shows relativism to be absurd.¹⁸

The Limits of Military Ethics

The conclusion I reach concerning military ethics is that there are serious limits to it. Soldiers' moral obligation to disobey orders when they are illegal or immoral shows the limits of having only military rules. We must answer to society and God as well. The values of society include religious values, most of which are Christian values in the U.S. Even if Christians were in a minority in the military, as Christians, Christian ethics would necessarily be in tension with strictly military ethics. Gabriel, at least, recognizes that military ethics is not the last word for soldiers. He writes, "For the soldier military ethics

¹⁶ Johnson, 75.

¹⁷ James L. Nard, "Values and the Professional Soldier," in *The Parameters of Military Ethics*, ed. Lloyd J. Matthews and Dale E. Brown (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1989), 79.

¹⁸ Ibid., 80-81.

is only one part of his total ethical self."¹⁹ I would add that, if the soldier is a Christian, military ethics would be a sub-part of his or her Christian ethics. Walzer, in noting the tension between military ethics and other systems of ethics, says, "I must conclude, therefore, that the non-hierarchical responsibilities of officers have, at this moment, no satisfactory institutional form." Walzer concludes, therefore that there is a tension between military ethics and ethics.²⁰ I agree, but I would add that the resolution of this tension for Christian soldiers is on the side of Christian ethics. Christians, then, must develop military ethics from within the Christian framework.

Military Solutions

Within the military community, there is a debate over the need for a professional code of ethics. Dyck writes, "For example, there is no consensus as to whether a military ethic should or should not be based upon some kind of code. In fact, the value of a code is disputed."²¹ Matthews, more than any other, seems to have made the case for the need of a code of ethics for the military. He writes, "The officer's grand corpus of ethical literature is so stupefyingly plenteous as to defy effective assimilation and practical use." Matthews points out that the Army has the West Point Motto, the U.S. Military Academy Cadet Honor Code, the Oath of Office, the Constitution of the United States, the Officer's Commission or Warrant, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the Officer Evaluation Report, Field Manual (FM) 100-1, FM 22-100, the Laws of War, the Code of Conduct, Standards of Conduct, service customs and traditions, and the values of American

¹⁹ Gabriel, 26.

²⁰ Walzer, 71.

²¹ Arthur J. Dyck, "Ethical Bases of the Military Profession," *Parameters* 10, no. 1: 42.

society.²² Therefore, according to Matthews, the problem is that we have too much ethical guidance. We have no manageable code. What the military needs, then, is something to improve its morality--a code that soldiers can easily learn, that is manageable, understandable, and effective. To be accurate, the Army does have one code--The Code of Conduct. However, this code only addresses how soldiers are to act while held as prisoners of war.²³ Besides this code, the Army does not have a code that serves as a professional code of ethics, much less one that addresses how to resolve the tension between military ethics and other ethical systems.

Axinn advocates an appropriate distinction between military morality and a moral military. He says that military morality is not morality, since modifying morality with the word "military" makes it something other than morality. What we need is a moral military, not military morality. Working for a moral military would focus on the kinds of moral acts the military should be doing or avoiding.²⁴ Wakin, along similar lines, writes, "Courage, selflessness, loyalty--these are the qualities we seek in our military professionals, but *knowing* about them does not produce them in a crisis. It is *moral character* we seek, must have, at every level of military leadership."²⁵ What Axinn and Wakin point to in their call for a moral military and moral character leads me to what I see as Christian solutions to the problem of military ethics.

²²Lloyd J. Matthews, "The Need for an Officer's Code of Professional Ethics," *Army* (March 1994): 22-23.

²³DA Pam 360-512, *Code of the U.S. Fighting Force*, June 1988.

²⁴Axinn, 5.

²⁵Malham M. Wakin, "Wanted: Moral Virtues in the Military," *USAF Academy Journal of Professional Military Ethics* (1988): 55.

Christian Solutions

Ideally, Christians already have ethics (Christian ethics) and do not need other codes to direct their behavior. A code may be acceptable if it applies Christian ethics to military situations before the fact. Thinking ethically as a Christian about future situations, such as in the conditions of war, would allow Christians to act decisively and ethically in difficult situations in which time may be scarce.

Chaplain Eubank writes, "I am not saying that officers *must be* devout Christians, Jews, Catholics, or Muslims to be good leaders. I am saying that in order to understand Professional Military Ethics, every military leader must have a basic understanding of how Judeo-Christian values and religious teachings have provided the foundation for moral thinking which are the basis of Army values and the Professional Military Ethic."²⁶ Chaplain Eubank surely meant to include "Catholics" within the term "Christians," in his first sentence. Considering the values upon which this country was founded, I also think, of the religious groups mentioned, Christians, by far, were the most influential. Therefore, it would be appropriate to say that, to understand basic (ideal) Army values, one would need to understand Christian values. I do think, however, that, even though Army values were originally based on Christian ones, the current military climate has drifted a long way from its base. Therefore, whether Christians see the need today to instill those Christian values anew or instill them for the first time, the need is the same. Whatever military ethics are, we assert that Christian ethics supersede them. Helgeson notes that the Oath of Office contains a moral obligation to God. He writes, "The last

²⁶Donald W. Eubank, *How and Why We Make Moral Decisions*, unpublished paper, nd, 3.

moral obligation I have from my oath is my loyalty to a supreme being.²⁷ I am glad Helgeson mentioned God, though he used the euphemistic and noncommittal phrase, "supreme being," but I want to move this moral obligation from being the last to being the first. I realize that this may not sit well with those in the military who are not Christian, but since most soldiers in the U.S. Army are Christians, I expect most soldiers to either agree with me or, if their Christianity is a sham, quit claiming to be something they are not. Either way, once again, we will realize honesty and integrity among the ranks.

²⁷ Larry A. Helgeson, "Moral Obligations from Our Oath to the U.S. Constitution," *USAF Academy Journal of Professional Military Ethics* (1988): 16.

CHAPTER 8

APPLICATIONS OF AMOS TO MILITARY ETHICS

I have already applied Amos to ethics in chapter six, but now I want to narrow the focus to the question: What does Amos have to say about military ethics? Another way to ask the question is: How does Amos apply to my being a Christian in the U.S. Army? How does ethics in Amos affect my moral behavior in the military environment? I will answer these questions by considering my earlier conclusions about ethics in Amos from a military point of view. Specifically, I will consider ethical applications at the levels of natural law, principles, paradigms, and theological concepts. Then I will apply ethics in Amos to military chaplains in their various roles.

Natural Law

At the natural law level of ethics, Amos speaks most clearly to the issues of sexual immorality, dishonesty, drunkenness, and the inhumane treatment of others.

Sexual Immorality

The recent sexual abuse scandal at Aberdeen has increased public awareness of sexual immorality in the military. However, that incident both differs from and reflects a more widespread problem. Adultery is illegal in the military, but it seems to me to occur with at least the same frequency as among the civilian population. This is a national moral problem. The difference is that, in the military, it is illegal and expressly

forbidden. The hypocrisy, therefore, is greater in the military if this rule is casually broken and seldom enforced. It is not right to enforce this rule only when looking for ways to put a disliked soldier out of the military, but to ignore it among liked soldiers. The military, to be consistent, must either eliminate the rule against adultery or enforce the law in every case without discrimination. The prevalence of pornography is another symptom of sexual immorality in the military. I will not argue whether pornography is morally wrong or not. To me, it is obviously evil. The military must not allow its facilities to sell pornography. Furthermore, the military should ban pornography from the workplace.

Dishonesty

The military, for its own survival, must reinstall honesty as a professional virtue. My observation of military units is that lying and falsifying reports is commonplace to look well and pass inspections. To cover up something to save the unit's or the military's image is often the first alternative considered and subsequently acted upon. The macho, "can do" attitude that claims the ability to accomplish any mission is a big lie. It is dishonest, dangerous, and immoral. As long as "zero defects" is the standard, dishonesty will be inevitable. As long as statistics make the difference between reward and punishment, lying and deception will be necessary survival techniques. Only a change in the military system and ways of doing things can achieve any substantial move toward making honesty an attribute of professional soldiers.

Drunkenness

The issue of drunkenness is another obvious connection between Amos and the military. It is true that the military has moved in the right direction to address the problems of alcohol abuse, but it has taken baby steps when giant steps are much more appropriate. It seems to me to be hypocritical to punish soldiers severely for alcohol related problems while encouraging them and making it easier for them to drink more. Not all soldiers charged with drunk driving are punished or punished equally. Furthermore, how can it be ethically consistent to punish alcohol abusers while providing alcohol on military posts at a much cheaper price than off post? Also, how can it be ethically consistent to punish alcohol abusers while officers at military balls expect excessive drinking and coercively encourage drunkenness? If leaders set the example in the military, the example most often being set is that drunkenness is a virtue.

What the military ethically must do is obvious. Military social events should set the example that drunkenness is a vice. Leaders must discourage drunkenness. Soldiers should never see an intoxicated officer. I am not saying that these leaders should hide when they are drunk. I am saying leaders should never get drunk. Military facilities must not sell alcoholic beverages cheaper than civilian ones. If a soldier has five dollars to spend on beer, he or she should not be able to buy twice as much beer with five dollars on post as off post. This only encourages the soldier to get twice as intoxicated.

Inhumane Treatment of Others

Our military does well in treating prisoners of war humanely. We avoid war crimes similar to those Amos condemns because we generally abide by the laws of war.

In this area, the military simply needs to sustain its commitment to the laws of war. There are other groups of people, however, whom we can treat inhumanely--our own soldiers and their family members. The military is currently striving to improve its moral treatment of women and minorities. On these issues, as I see it, the military is making good and positive progress, although, we have not completely solved the problems.

Principle of Justice

The principle of justice is central to Amos and is related to the paradigm of God as a just God. The principle of justice demands involvement on behalf of the powerless and abused. In the military, this principle is realized in genuine and impartial concern for the soldiers and their family members that we are responsible for. It is least realized when rank or influence is abused to achieve assistance commonly due everyone, but those without rank or influence are neglected, ignored, and denied assistance commonly due everyone. Just war principles are expressions of the principle of justice. Although war itself is absurd and tragic, justice demands that we fight for the powerless and abused, those who cannot successfully fight for themselves. It demands we do something to ensure the powerless get fair treatment that is due all people. It means that we care for others and, when necessary, come to the aid of our fellowman.

Paradigms

Three paradigms in Amos, the paradigms of Amos himself, God's involvement in social issues, and the religious community's responsibility, speak to today's Christians in the military.

The Prophet

Amos, the prophet, is a paradigm for chaplains and other ministers. As with Amos, chaplains are called to speak for God. Chaplains are called to speak God's truth boldly. To be a prophet or a chaplain is risky business. One of the official roles of the Army chaplain is to speak prophetically. This is the ideal, but not the norm. The military itself strongly discourages chaplains from boldly speaking the truth. Simply stated, the prophet who speaks the truth in the military will receive negative evaluation reports and be put out of the service. The military system must change if it wants chaplains to be prophetic and truthful. As long as chaplains' promotions and evaluations are based on the same standard and the same officer's evaluation report system as other officers, the mouths of chaplains will remain shut. The few who dare to be like Amos and speak the truth will be quickly eliminated from the service. I do not know how to design a better system, but I can suggest possible alternatives. Chaplains could serve without government pay. Churches could financially support the chaplains they endorse for military service. To receive government money is to receive government regulation. It would be much easier for the system to evaluate chaplains under different standards if money is not an issue. Chaplains could serve without rank. The evaluation system is based on evaluating officers of equal rank equally. For chaplains not to be evaluated as a captain or major they would have not to be a captain or major. These two suggestions I have made could help chaplains speak for God. The question is: Do those in positions of power, in the chaplaincy or the broader military, want chaplains to be free to speak for

God and to speak the truth? At present, the answer is no. The military today does not want prophets who speak the truth.

God is Involved in Social Issues

God is the paradigm of involvement in the burning social issues of Amos' and our day. Since God's people should be involved where God is involved, Christians need to discover where God is at work. The application of this paradigm is varied in time and place. To apply this paradigm requires discernment of social, economic, political, religious, and other conditions. Different communities may have different burning social issues. The danger is that it is easy to get involved in issues that we think are important, but fail to see that God is at work somewhere else. For example, to get involved on a military post to oppose abortions would be to work where God is not working. The military prohibits its hospitals from doing abortions. Therefore, abortion is not an issue on military posts. However, to ignore that the majority of welfare recipients in some communities near military installations are lower ranking military families who also live in substandard housing is to miss an opportunity to work with God on a clear and present social problem.

Religious Community's Responsibility

The paradigm of Israel being communally responsible to God and communally judged by God is often misconstrued. To think of America as analogous to Israel is a mistake. Israel was a religious nation. More than being a nation, Israel was the people of God. As God's people, Israel was held communally responsible for the behavior of its people. America is not a religious nation. The church is the correct analogy to Israel.

What Amos says to Christians in the military, the church in the military, is that the greatest need today is revival and renewal. The military church, as the civilian church, must first be the faithful worshipping community of God's people. Once the church returns to genuine worship and service that God requires of the people of God, its inward mission, then the church should focus on evangelism, its outward mission.

Theological Concepts

Three of Amos' theological concepts, election, allegiance and obedience, and remembering, speak to today's military Christians.

Election

As did Israel, Christians see themselves as the elect, the chosen. As Amos warned Israel, Amos warns Christians in America that election is not a guarantee that God will protect America from destruction. The American myth is that America is God's new chosen, special people. Some myths have a shred of truth in them. This myth, however, does not. The challenge of the concept of being God's elect for Christians today is to accept and live up to our greater responsibility for ministry and service. Election is not to a higher level of superiority, but to a higher level of responsibility.

Allegiance and Obedience

The allegiance and obedience to God that God requires is total. The Christian soldier faces no option between Christian worship and Christian ethics. Amos made it clear that ethics and religion are one. If they are separate, neither is genuine. What this means for the Christian soldier is that there is never a choice between acting morally as a Christian and acting morally, in a different way, as a soldier. A Christian soldier morally

can do nothing else but act always as a Christian. A military ethics would be fine, unless it conflicts with Christian ethics. The Christian soldier should see no dilemma here. When faced with the choice to act morally as a Christian or as a soldier or as anything else, the only correct answer is to act morally as a Christian. If I can act as a soldier in ways I cannot act as a Christian, then either I am not really a Christian after all, or I am a Christian making a grave mistake and denying my faith. According to Amos, the erroneous idea that religion and ethics could be separated was one of the causes for Israel's complete destruction.

Remembering

Remembering, for Amos, serves at least two purposes. Remembering God's past blessings encourages us to live moral lives according to God's will. It shows God's power and sovereignty. It gives us guidance and hope. Remembering God's past judgments against evil serves as warnings of the wages of sin. God sends out many warning signs and opportunities to repent, but there comes a time when the God of justice must judge and punish evil. Christians in the military can adapt this theological concept to the after action review process that strives to learn from mistakes and constantly improve performance. Christians should learn from the mistakes of the past and avoid outcomes similar to the destruction of Israel.

None of this matters to modern Christians if they do not believe God punishes the evil or blesses the good. Amos' theological concepts would imply that Christians in America need to renew and revive true faith and morality to save America from judgment. In other words, the greatest threat to America is faithlessness, idolatry,

injustice, and immorality within the church, the people of God. Among human beings on earth, only Christians, only the church, can save our nation. Do we believe this? If we do, the urgency of revival and evangelism becomes clear. Also, we have an awesome responsibility. Furthermore, we see that God is at work in our world today. If we do not believe this, then we may have become modern Deists or we may believe God is dead, asleep, or on vacation.

A Challenge to Chaplains

Three of the roles of the military chaplain are chaplain as advisor to the commander, as religious leader, and as example for others. I conclude this study of ethics in Amos with a challenge to chaplains in these three roles.

As Advisors

Chaplains advise commanders on matters of religion and morale as affected by religion. Chaplains also are expected to be prophetic, bold and honest, in the advice they give commanders. I already discussed how the system works against chaplains being free and able actually to be prophetic. Therefore, in the less than ideal meanwhile, we chaplains must do everything we can to encourage, reward, and support fellow chaplains bold enough to be prophetic and genuine enough to tell the truth. Chaplains in positions to make a difference should work hard to change the system. As long as chaplains are afraid to tell commanders the truth, chaplains may just as well be replaced by some other officer who does not mind acting without honesty and integrity. If chaplains have a difficult time maintaining their integrity and being honest in the current military environment, how much more difficult must it be for the average soldier?

As Religious Leaders

As religious leaders, chaplains need to be leading in two main directions: inwardly and outwardly. The need for revival and renewal among the church in the military is too urgent to ignore. If unit and officer requirements are so heavy on unit chaplains that they have no resources left for the inward ministry to the church, then change is essential. If programs have to be eliminated, tasks to unit chaplains reduced, then that is what must be done for chaplains to be about the task of leading Christians in renewal and revival. To focus on the outward ministry before inward ministry is to put the horse before the cart. The chaplain is the leader of Christians who do ministry as a church. The chaplain is not the lone ranger, the only Christian to do ministry in the military. The outward ministry of the church certainly includes evangelism. This is another area where the military system, sacrificing to the god of pluralism, greatly restricts chaplains. The good news is that the military does not restrict other soldiers from evangelizing nearly as much as it does chaplains. Therefore, chaplains as leaders should be training, equipping, and encouraging Christians in the outward ministry of the church. The tragedy is that most chaplains do not seem to be involved in the military Christian community as religious leaders at all. Many military leaders think religious leader means staff officer who specializes in religious matters. We need to correct this error. Being a religious leader is not a staff officer function. A religious leader is what a minister is when he or she is leading Christians in the church. The kinds of religious leadership needed varies, but, in my opinion, the current priorities must be revival followed by evangelism.

As Example Setters

Chaplains, more than anyone else in the military, are expected to set the standard for ethical behavior. Chaplains are moral standard bearers in the military. The implication of this is that chaplains must be visible advocates for change on behalf of the powerless and abused. Chaplains must be visibly working to improve the military moral environment by combating sexual immorality, dishonesty, drunkenness, and unjust treatment of minorities, among other burning social issues. If chaplains do not set the example by being against the evils in the community, then what motivation will others have to fix moral problems? Furthermore, if others are advocates for justice and against immorality while chaplains avoid getting involved, then does not this mean chaplains and God are working apart and not together? If someone raises a serious moral issue before chaplains raise the same issue, I would wonder why the chaplains are not doing their job of speaking for God and getting involved with God in the burning social and moral issues of the community. If chaplains are often not involved or concerned about many social and moral issues, it is no wonder that Christians, by following their example, also show no concern for such things. Chaplains, please, for Christ's sake, for the church's sake, and for the nation's sake, let us set an example that makes a difference.

APPENDIX A

THE REDACTION OF AMOS

As with most biblical prophets, Amos is a collection of oracles and other types of prophecy, not a record of one long continuous sermon. Two scholars who make this very clear are McCullough¹ and Hyatt. Hyatt says, "It is a mistake, therefore, for us to think of the Book of Amos as containing one long sermon preached by the prophet (as Julian Morgenstern, for example expounds it). It contains many brief utterances, sometimes only a few lines, delivered upon different occasions and to various groups."²

Not only Amos, but all prophetic books in the Old Testament went through more than one stage of redaction. Vawter agrees with this and proclaims, "No single prophetic book is the work, or derives from the work, of any one prophetic genius: all of them are works of redaction and supplementation from many hands, prophetic and otherwise."³ Amos is like the other prophetic books in this respect. Coote boldly states, "First, the concept is an historical fact. The book of Amos was composed by more than one person."⁴ Not all scholars agree on this point, however. Rosenbaum says, ". . . I think Amos's words were collected, perhaps written down, shortly after they were spoken, thus

¹ McCullough, 248.

² Hyatt, 340.

³ Vawter, 10.

⁴ Robert B. Coote, *Amos among the Prophets: Composition and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 3.

making most suggestions for 'redaction' superfluous.⁵ Facing all the evidence to the contrary, however, most scholars admit that some redaction of Amos must have occurred. So Coote is probably right. Coote writes, "In between Amos and the final edition of the book of Amos there were other editions of his words, possibly several, composed by several different authors."⁶ Furthermore, Coote points out that the process of the redaction of Amos is the process of preserving the book in the first place. Coote continues, ". . . far from regretting that the book of Amos is the end result of a process of recomposition, I am grateful. The reason is simple: if it were not, we would not have it."⁷

Authentic and Secondary Material in Amos

Speaking of all biblical prophecy in general, Blenkinsopp claims, ". . . it is now impossible to distinguish between 'authentic' and 'secondary' in the prophetic material that has been allowed to survive."⁸ All theories and reconstructions of redaction processes are speculative. In spite of this fact, I believe most prophetic material can be determined, with a high degree of probability, to be either genuine or secondary. Certain passages will always remain problematic, but most passages fit well into the scholarly consensus as either authentic or secondary. Also, because later redactors added material, it does not preclude that material from being, in fact, genuine material not included in the

⁵ Rosenbaum, 6.

⁶ Coote, 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Blenkinsopp, 31.

first edition. In speaking of "authentic" material in Amos, I am referring to the material in the first edition of the literary work, whether written by Amos or another person.

Some scholars argue that all of Amos is genuine. Ralph Smith writes ". . . there is nothing here which Amos *could* not have said."⁹ Billy Smith states, "There is, therefore, no reason to ascribe any part of this book to anyone other than the prophet Amos."¹⁰ Billy Smith even holds that Amos could have written about himself in the third person in Amos 1:1 and 7:10-17.¹¹ I think attributing all the book of Amos to Amos the prophet is to ignore the evidence to the contrary. Other scholars argue that most, but not all, of Amos is genuine. Redaction notwithstanding, Hammershaimb states, ". . . there is little against accepting that almost all the book goes back to Amos himself."¹² McCullough, also, takes most of Amos to be genuine. McCullough writes, "The fact is that if we take the prophecy of Amos to be mostly genuine, the book hangs together rather well, and we do not need to introduce hypothetical glossators whose existence and methods are largely our own creation. . . . The position outlined above does not imply that our book is free from textual corruptions or from all accretions. The two clearest examples of sizable additions to the text are 2:4-5 and 9:8d-15."¹³

Scholars who accept that Amos underwent some redaction generally agree that the oracles in the first two chapters against the nations of Tyre, Edom, and Judah are later additions. Two scholars in particular who hold this view are Blenkinsopp¹⁴ and

⁹ Ralph Smith, 56.

¹⁰ Billy Smith, 29.

¹¹ Ibid., 36, 135.

¹² Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, 14.

¹³ McCullough, 247-8.

Martin-Achard.¹⁵

The restoration passage (Amos 9:11-15) appears to me to be a later addition to the book of Amos, in the same way that other prophetic books regularly have restoration passages appended near the end of the book. Some scholars disagree with this assessment, but those who disagree generally are the same ones who want to claim that all or most of Amos is genuine. Two scholars who want to claim that Amos 9:11-15 is genuine are McCullough¹⁶ and Billy Smith.¹⁷ Even though the restoration passage in Amos seems to be contrary to the message of the rest of the book, Billy Smith claims, "The message of hope and restoration following repeated oracles of doom may be startling to some, but the typical pattern of oracles in the other eight century B.C. prophets is that of hope for salvation following oracles of judgment."¹⁸ What is interesting in Billy Smith's argument is that other scholars interpret the same typical pattern of restoration passages following oracles of judgment to be convincing evidence in support for their *not* being genuine. In other words, the typical pattern was not for prophets always to conclude their preaching on a good note, but for redactors to ensure the prophetic books generally ended with a positive message of hope and restoration.

Another way of looking at the question of genuine prophetic material is to ask to what degree written prophecy is related to the actual words that the prophet originally spoke.¹⁹ Haran's answer is probably correct. Haran writes, "What is, then, the

¹⁴ Blenkinsopp, 89.

¹⁵ Martin-Achard, 7.

¹⁶ McCullough, 254.

¹⁷ Billy Smith, 29, 33-34.

¹⁸ Ibid., 164.

relationship between the prophetic literary unit and the address that preceded it? It may be said that the written prophecy contains, at the most, among other things, a kind of paraphrase of the content of the actual address, but in a summarized form and only in a literary recasting. In addition, it is only natural that such sorts of elements should have cropped up in the written prophecy which were literary in their intrinsic quality and were directed solely to the reader.¹⁹ In my opinion, Haran just described the basic nature of the book Amos.

Conclusions about the authorship of Amos do not affect the scriptural authority of Amos. Honeycutt discusses the authorship of Amos 9:8b-15 (a later addition to Amos in his view) and explains the relation of authorship and authority. Honeycutt writes, ". . . to deny that Amos wrote the passage does not deny the validity of the message. It still represents the revelation of God, despite the fact that it may not have come through Amos."²⁰

Historical Periods of Redaction

Among those who accept redaction as a reality in canonical prophetic books, most agree that the two main periods of redaction which one encounters in Amos, and other prophetic writings as well, are related to the periods of Assyrian and Babylonian conquest and exiling of the Hebrews. Expanding on these periods, Miller writes, "The religious atmosphere of each of the following periods should be noted: prosperity and

¹⁹ Certainly it is possible that some biblical prophecy was not the writing down of a message that others heard, but was first and only a literary message for others to read. However, I chose not to deal with that issue in this paper.

²⁰ Haran, 392.

²¹ Honeycutt, *Amos and His Message: An Expository Commentary*, 16-17.

social injustice during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel (786-746 B.C.); the insecurity felt by Amos' later followers and their contemporaries in the face of the campaigns of Tiglath-Pileser III about 735 B.C.; the reformist enthusiasm generated a century later by the Josians in Judah; the sense of guilt experienced by the Deuteronomists of the Exile (597-573 B.C.); the hopeful longing in the salvationist prophecies of the postexilic period.²²

Five Sample Redaction Theories

As a simple "rule of thumb" approach to redaction in Amos, Auld suggests that the passages referring to social issues are authentic Amos passages, and those referring to cultic issues are not.²³

Mays considers most of the book to be genuine Amos material with the following exceptions. Amos 1:1, 1:9-12, 2:4-5, 7:10-17, and 9:11-15 come from the exilic period. Amos 1:2, 4:13, 5:8-9, 9:5-6, and possibly 8:8 are hymnic sections from a cultic source in Judah. Amos 5:13 come from a wisdom source. Mays sees other minor additions as well.²⁴

Coote, admitting to oversimplification, argues for a three-stage process of Amos redaction. Coote's A stage is the eighth century edition, the original Amos edition; his B stage is the seventh century edition, and his C stage is the sixth century edition.²⁵ Coote's B and C stages reflect the concerns during and following the periods of Assyrian and

²²Charles H. Miller, "Amos and Faith Structures: A New Approach," *The Bible Today* 19, no. 5 (September 1981): 315.

²³Auld, 60-63.

²⁴Mays, 12-13.

²⁵Coote, 8.

Babylonian exile. Most of the book as we now have it come from the first two stages. Coote writes, "The addressees of the A stage are the secure, the strong, the well-to-do, the well-housed and well-fed, the authorities, the holders of power and privilege--in short, the ruling elite of Israel's agrarian society."²⁶ Coote sees the B stage Amos as not addressing social issues, as the A stage Amos, but dealing with the cultic issue of which place was the right place to conduct worship. The B stage Amos argues Jerusalem (not Bethel, for instance) is the only right place to worship Yahweh.²⁷

I developed the diagram below to illustrate Stuhlmueller's redaction theory, based on descriptions in his book.

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

²⁷ Ibid., 48.

STUHLMUELLER'S REDACTIONAL OUTLINE OF AMOS²⁸

THE ORIGINAL AMOS EDITION		
1. Introduction		1:1-2
2. Four presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Oracles against the nations b. Three judgment speeches ("hear this word") c. Three collections of woe Sayings d. Four Visions 	1:3-2:16 3:1-5:6 5:7-17, 5:18-27, 6:1-14 7:1-9, 8:1-3
LATER ADDITIONS TO AMOS		
3. A biographical account stitched into the account of the visions		7:10-17
4. Two longer portions different from rest of the book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A judgment speech b. A vision story 	8:4-14 9:1-4
5. Appendix of four separate "one-liners"		9:7-10
6. Liturgical fragments of a hymnic style		4:13, 5:8-9, 9:5-6
7. Final additions during or after Babylonian exile		9:11-15

Harper maintains that about one fifth of Amos is of later origin.²⁹ Below is a reasonable facsimile of the diagram in Harper's book showing the redaction process of Amos.

²⁸ Stuhlmueller, 9-10.

²⁹ William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, a vol. of *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1953), vii.

HARPER'S ANALYSIS OF AMOS³⁰

	ORIGINAL	SECONDARY	SUBJECT	§
		1.1 1.2	<i>The Superscription.</i> <i>The Text or Motto.</i>	1 2
The Oracles: 1.3-2.16	1.3-5, 6-8, 13-15, 2.1-3 2.6-11, 13-16	1.9-10, 11-12, 2.4-5 2.12	Judgments upon Neighboring Nations, viz. Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah. Judgment upon the Nation Israel.	3 4
	3.1-8 3.9-4.3		The Roar of the Lion: Destruction is Coming. The Doom of Samaria.	5 6
The Sermons: 3.1-6.14	4.4-7a, 8b-12, 13e 5.1-6 5.7, 10-17 5.18a, c, 19-22a, 23-6.1, 3-8, 11b-14	4.7b, 8a, 13a-d 5.8-9 5.18b, 22b, 6.2, 9-11a	Israel's Failure to understand the Divine Judgment. A Dirge, Israel's Coming Destruction. Transgressors shall come to Grief. The Doom of Captivity.	7 8 9 10
	7.1a-c, 2-7, 8b, 9 7.10-17	7.1d, 8a	Three Visions of Destruction. An Accusation and a Reply.	11 12
The Visions: 7.1-9.8b	8.1, 2b-5, 7-10, 11b-14 9.1-4, 7-8b	8.2a, 6, 11a 9.5-6	A Fourth Vision, with Explanatory Discourse. A Fifth Vision, with a Passionate Description of the Ruin	13 14
		9.8c, 9-15	<i>A Later Voice of Promise.</i>	15

*Titles in *Italics* belong to late sections.

³⁰ Harper, cxxxii.

APPENDIX B

EXEGESIS OF AMOS

Overview

A brief review of the situation would help at this point. As Clements makes clear, when Amos mentions Israel, he means only the northern kingdom, for he prophesied in a time of two kingdoms.¹ Amos dealt with the coming destruction of Israel, not Judah. Later redactors, after the fall of the northern kingdom, would once again use Israel to refer to all of Israel, since, for all practical purposes, the only Hebrews left were in Judah.

Israel had turned away from God and had ignored God's repeated warnings and chastisements. The sin of Israel had permeated all avenues of human relations. Israel had become completely perverted economically, politically, religiously, and socially. It was as Kelso says, "The whole spirit of justice seemed to have gone wrong."² God decided enough was enough; Israel would have to be destroyed. God commissioned Amos to let the people know their time had run out. Concerning the message of Amos, Clements writes, "The message of the prophet Amos represents a decisive no to the future of Israel."³ Soon Israel would cease to exist as a nation.

¹ Ronald E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 25.

² James L. Kelso, "Amos: A Critical Study," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 85, no. 337 (January 1928): 57.

³ Clements, 23.

My main concern in this exegesis is with passages that, in my opinion, contain ethical material. I will quote these "ethical" passages as they occur in the discussion below. I will also briefly discuss other passages, but I will not quote them. Also, I am not concerned to translate the text afresh or get bogged down with details of Hebrew grammar. My concern is to find ethics in Amos.

Amos 1:1-2 (Introduction)

Amos 1:1 obviously is someone other than Amos writing about Amos. About all that we can gather from this verse is that Amos had something to do with shepherds of Tekoa around 750 B.C. Amos 1:2 serves as a motto for the book. It clearly shows God is not happy with the current situation. Billy Smith interprets this verse to mean Amos was a sheep breeder, not a shepherd.⁴ Routtenberg discusses the Rabbis interpretation of this verse, along with 7:14, and notes, "According to them Amos was himself the owner of the flocks that he tended and of the sycomore [sic] trees he dressed."⁵

Amos 1:3-2:16 (Oracles Against the Nations)

Amos 1:3-2:16 contains oracles against foreign nations followed by surprisingly similar oracles against Judah and Israel. Amos uses the technique of oracles against other nations to hold the people's interest and get them to hear the message of Israel's doom. The oracles against other nations are true and have value in their own right, but their real purpose in the text is as a rhetorical device.⁶ The bounds of Amos' political

⁴Billy Smith, 27.

⁵Hyman J. Routtenberg, *Amos of Tekoa: A Study in Interpretation* (New York: Vantage Press, 1971), 24.

⁶Ward, 4.

and social awareness go far beyond just Israel. He yearns, as Asen says, for "justice for all people and groups."⁷

Amos 1:3-2:5 (Oracles Against Nations Other than Israel)

According to Barton, Balaam was the first and Amos the second prophet chronologically in the Old Testament to use the form of oracles against foreign nations, which was related to military affairs. Furthermore, Amos did nothing new in the oracles against foreign nations, but continued prophetic tradition. However, Amos' use of this form was for a different purpose than its customary military use. Amos was not concerned with winning wars by aid of the prophetic word, but with announcing God's judgment against Israel. Barton also says that Amos authored five original oracles. The oracles against Tyre, Edom, and Judah are later additions.⁸

Concerning Amos' use of oracles against these nations, Barton argues, ". . . he was appealing to a kind of conventional customary law about international conduct which he at least believed to be self-evidently right, and which he thought he could count on his audience's familiarity with and acquiescence in. . . . he sees moral conduct as a matter of conformity to a human convention held to be obviously universal, rather than to the overt or explicit demands of God."⁹ Barton continues, "Amos is original in asserting that social injustices and transgression of the moral code in Israelite society (perhaps equated with

⁷ Asen, 108.

⁸ John Barton, *Amos' Oracles Against the Nations: A Study of Amos 1.3-2.5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 3-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

'the law') have the same moral status as transgressions of the much more 'self-evident' laws of international conduct and of the practice of war."¹⁰

Amos 1:3-2:3 (Oracles Against Foreign Nations)

Stuhlmueller, Kelso, and Ralph Smith seem to understand Amos correctly in these particular verses as being based on a natural law understanding of ethics. Stuhlmueller writes, "Each foreign city is condemned for 'crimes against humanity,' such as acting as middle persons in selling captive soldiers into slavery, waging war with excessive cruelty, and profaning the bones of the dead."¹¹ Kelso similarly states, "All the above are sins involving the violation of the *conscience*. They are sins even according to natural theology, and even according to natural theology must be punished."¹² Finally, Ralph Smith explains, "None of these nations is accused of breaking the covenant, nor of rejecting the law of God. Their sins are the crimes of man's inhumanity to man." ". . . cruelty in war; slavery; and hatred. . . . Such sins even among pagans could not go unpunished."¹³

Amos 1:3-5 (Sin of Damascus)

1:3 Thus says the LORD:
 For three transgressions of Damascus,
 and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
 because they have threshed Gilead
 with threshing sledges of iron.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹¹ Stuhlmueller, 13.

¹² Kelso, 61.

¹³ Ralph Smith, 52, 53.

¹⁴ This and all subsequent quotations of scripture are from the New Revised Standard Version.

The "For three transgressions . . . and for four, I will not revoke the punishment" seems to mean "I will not change my plans" or "I will not take back my (prophetic) word." The sin Amos condemns here is the inhumane treatment of prisoners of war. Barton says some have interpreted the threshing with threshing sledges as a "metaphor for harsh treatment in war," but he argues it is "a literal description of torture meted out to prisoners of war."¹⁵

Amos 1:6-8 (Sin of Gaza)

1:6 Thus says the LORD:
 For three transgressions of Gaza,
 and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
 because they carried into exile entire communities,
 to hand them over to Edom.

The sin Amos condemns here is not exiling conquered people, but exiling whole communities. Amos does not tell us to whom Gaza did this.

Amos 1:9-10 (Sins of Tyre)

1:9 Thus says the LORD:
 For three transgressions of Tyre,
 and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
 because they delivered entire communities over to Edom,
 and did not remember the covenant of kinship.

The sins Amos condemns here are the exiling of whole communities and breaking a treaty or agreement with their own kin. As Barton points out, we do not know which people or communities Tyre sold to Edom.¹⁶

¹⁵ Barton, 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., 20.

Amos 1:11-12 (Sins of Edom)

1:11 Thus says the LORD:
 For three transgressions of Edom,
 and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
 because he pursued his brother with the sword
 and cast off all pity;
 he maintained his anger perpetually,
 and kept his wrath forever.

The sins Amos condemns here are not showing pity, military attacks against his brother (possibly referring to the enmity between Esau and Jacob, now seen as between Edom and Israel), and failing to manage anger properly. Amos here points to a biblical truth that is also found later in Ephesians 5:26: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger."

Amos 1:13-15 (Sin of Ammon)

1:13 Thus says the LORD:
 For three transgressions of the Ammonites,
 and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
 because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead
 in order to enlarge their territory.

The sin Amos condemns here is obvious, but the intent may not be. Assuming most or all the men of fighting age are also killed, killing babies and fetuses will further eliminate the possibility of a future generation capable of retaliation or rebellion. This would make it much easier to hold captured territory. For another reference to ripping open pregnant women, 2 Kings 15:16 describes this sin done by a king of Israel, Menahem, who became king about two years after Jeroboam II, but while Uzziah was still king in Judah.

Amos 2:1-3 (Sin of Moab)

2:1 Thus says the LORD:
 For three transgressions of Moab,
 and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
 because he burned to lime
 the bones of the king of Edom.

The sin Amos condemns here is the defilement of a corpse (lack of respect for the dead). It is interesting to note that the dead represent the ultimate state of powerlessness; and the root of social evil is the abuse, neglect, exploitation, oppression, disregard, and disrespect of the powerless by the powerful.

Amos 2:4-5 (Sins of Judah)

2:4 Thus says the LORD:
 For three transgressions of Judah,
 and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
 because they have rejected the law of the LORD,
 and have not kept his statutes,
 but they have been led astray by the same lies
 after which their ancestors walked.

The sins Amos condemns here are rejecting and disobeying God's laws and statutes and believing the lies of previous generations. These lies probably refer to false, perverted teachings of God's laws and statutes of which it should have been obvious to later generations that they were untrue. Unlike the sins of foreign nations, Judah's sins violate God's special revelation, not any natural law ethics. Comparing Judah's sin with that of the foreign nations, Kelso states, "The above sin was more; it was the violation of *Revelation*."¹⁷

¹⁷ Kelso, 61.

Amos 2:6-16 (Sins of Israel)

2:6 Thus says the LORD:
 For three transgressions of Israel,
 and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
 because they sell the righteous for silver,
 and the needy for a pair of sandals--
 2:7 they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth,
 and push the afflicted out of the way;
 father and son go in to the same girl,
 so that my holy name is profaned;
 2:8 they lay themselves down beside every altar
 on garments taken in pledge;
 and in the house of their God they drink
 wine bought with fines they imposed.

.....

2:12 But you made the nazirites drink wine,
 and commanded the prophets,
 saying, "You shall not prophesy."

The sins and doom of Israel, not those of foreign nations or Judah, is the real focus of 1:3-2:16. The sins of the other nations serve to lead up to the real issue--Israel. The sins Amos condemns here are oppression and exploitation of the poor and powerless (2:6-7), selfishness (2:7), greed (2:7), sexual immorality or abuse (2:7), immoral worship (2:8), ignoring and forgetting what God had done for them in the past (2:9-11), persecution and ridicule of the genuinely religious (2:12), and rejecting God by rejecting God's prophets (2:12).

Stuhlmueller writes, "Israel, too, is condemned for crimes against humanity rather than for violating cultic or refined religious norms."¹⁸ I do not know how Stuhlmueller came to this assessment; he must have accidentally been reading some other passage.

Kelso states that God condemned "Israel for violating both laws of *conscience* and *Revelation*." Kelso continues, "Conclusion: The Amorite was destroyed from Palestine

¹⁸ Stuhlmueller, 13-14.

for sins involving the violation of *conscience*. How much greater shall be the doom of Israel which has violated not only the laws of *conscience* but also the Law of *Revelation*.¹⁹ Ralph Smith adds, "Amos must have asked himself on behalf of his people, 'If those nations who have not been chosen and guided by God in a special way cannot escape his judgment, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' The answer was: there is no escape. Israel had not only sinned in the same way as her pagan neighbors; she had broken her covenant with God."²⁰ In comparison with the oracles against foreign nations, Asen says, "Against Israel, however, the charge is not war crimes against foreign nations but crimes against fellow countrymen."²¹ Mays is a little more clear on this and states, "In contrast to the accusations against the nations, which all come from the sphere of international relations, they stem from the social order of the national community."²² It is interesting to note, as Ward does, that in 2:11 "The issue here is *religious* persecution."²³ The worse fact is that this persecution is within their *own* religious community! Notice also, how Amos uses the word "the righteous" to mean "the innocent."²⁴ In Amos, the righteous are the innocent and the poor and powerless. The unrighteous are the guilty and the rich and powerful.

No one knows how to interpret 2:7. Some think it refers to temple prostitution, but I think this is unlikely. Others, like Martin-Achard, think it refers to mistreatment of

¹⁹ Kelso, 61.

²⁰ Ralph Smith, 53.

²¹ Asen, 105.

²² Mays, 47.

²³ Ward, 7.

²⁴ Martin-Achard, 21.

a female slave.²⁵ This is more plausible. Coote, however, gets very imaginative and suggests it refers to an alewife loan shark. Coote translates the passage simply as "a man and father go to the girl," and he maintains "in to" is incorrect and "same" is not even part of the Hebrew text. Coote writes, "A man and his father *must* go (the verb may be translated modally) to the alewife to obtain a loan at exorbitant rates or else a man and his father go to the alewife to invest for a usurious return."²⁶ Coote's alewife interpretation is speculation and does not fit the context.

Amos 3:1-2 (Elect Should Know Better)

3:1 Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt:
 3:2 You only have I known
 of all the families of the earth;
 therefore I will punish you
 for all your iniquities.

Israel's special relationship to God means greater responsibility. Israel failed to honor this privilege. This is also the observations of Honeycutt and Hammershaimb. Honeycutt states, "One cannot enjoy a privileged position without accepting responsibility."²⁷ Hammershaimb adds, ". . . it is precisely their special position that gives them so much the greater obligations than other nations."²⁸ Concerning Amos 3:1-2, Wolff writes, "The tradition of Israel's position as people of God . . . lays upon her certain obligations. These are seen in the absoluteness of the allegiance which she is to give to Yahweh, and the obedience which she is to give to his requirements. Without the

²⁵Ibid., 22.

²⁶Coote, 35.

²⁷Honeycutt, *Amos and His Message: An Expository Commentary*, 52.

²⁸Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, 57.

fulfillment of these, the relationship is broken because Israel will have declared herself unfit to be the people of God.²⁹ Wolff continues, "The requirement of absolute allegiance to Yahweh, the God of the Exodus events, is expressed in two main ways. There are the condemnations of idolatrous practice, alluded to rather than described. . . . The other aspect of this may be seen in the condemnation of Israel's false optimism, her pride in her military achievements, for the prophet condemns those. . . . So to boast is the denial of allegiance to Yahweh . . ."³⁰ Stuhlmueller has a different view of Amos 3:1-2. He maintains that, as God's special people that God liberated from Egypt, it was their violation of liberation themes that was the sin that brought about destruction of Israel.³¹ Shapiro, also, has a different view of this passage. He connects verse two with verse three and writes, "The prophet is asking: since God and Israel walk together, can this harmonious collaboration of the two take place unless there is a meeting of the minds? When His people walk in one direction, a direction that, contrary to God's expectations, will lead them astray, how can He walk together with them? There cannot be any meetings of the two under these circumstances."³²

Amos 3:3-8 (Cannot But Prophesy)

3:8 The lion has roared;
 who will not fear?
 The Lord God has spoken;
 who can but prophesy?

²⁹ Wolff, 7.

³⁰ Ibid., 8.

³¹ Stuhlmueller, 15.

³² David S. Shapiro, "The Seven Questions of Amos," *Tradition* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 328.

Amos 3:3-7 serves to lead up to the focal verse, 3:8. Amos 3:3-8 functions as a defense of Amos prophesying. Mays agrees with my view here.³³ Ethically, 3:8 argues that prophets are obligated to prophesy when God speaks. Along these lines, Ackroyd writes, "The declaration of the compulsive nature of the divine command to the prophet is set out with a forcefulness which reminds us of the similar sense of constraint felt by Jeremiah (e.g. 20.9), by Jesus (Luke 12.49-50), and by Paul (I Cor. 9.16)."³⁴ In line with Wolff's analysis of the wisdom influence on Amos mentioned earlier, Mays states, "In style and theme the questions are folk-sayings of the kind formulated and passed on among the landed peasantry."³⁵

Shapiro has unique interpretations of the series of questions, so I will include some of his conclusions. Concerning 3:4a, Shapiro writes, "Amos is thinking of what divine Providence has prepared for Israel unless it repents and walks once again with its God in the same direction." Concerning 3:4b, he states, "Amos, likewise, sees these neighbors of Israel, the young lions, taking advantage of Israel's weakness." Concerning 3:5a, he says, ". . . 'lure,' 'snare,' 'trap,' or 'net' refer to the fate of man caught in the web of his own sins. . . . The bird that is falling into the snare upon the earth is Israel lured into sin and landing on the snare it had prepared for itself." Concerning 3:5b, he writes, "The prophet sees Israel fallen from the heights and already in the grasp of the snare. Israel's sins have caught up with it." Concerning 3:6a, he states, "The ram's horn proclaims the approach of Israel's enemies. They are coming closer and closer. Amos visualizes the

³³ Mays, 59.

³⁴ Ackroyd, 6.

³⁵ Mays, 60.

people in the cities of Israel all atremble." Concerning 3:6b, he says, "Certainly God has so ordained it that the sins of Israel cause His protective umbrella to be withdrawn and, consequently, Israel's fall must inevitably follow." Finally, concerning 3:7, he writes, ". . . so God reveals His intention to His servants the prophets that they forestall and prevent the impending disaster."³⁶

Amos 3:9-11 (Trouble in Samaria)

3:9 Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod,
 and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt,
 and say, "Assemble yourselves on Mount Samaria,
 and see what great tumults are within it,
 and what oppressions are in its midst."
 3:10 They do not know how to do right, says the LORD,
 those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.

Samaria's sins are evident in the great tumults and oppressions that exist there, the observation that, though they should, they do not know how to do right, and the fact that they think they are secure in their strongholds while it is within them that violence and robbery gets worse every day. Concerning 3:11 and 6:14, Clements notices Amos did not mention Assyria, but it is obvious to us now that it was Assyria who would conquer Israel.³⁷ As I mentioned in chapter three, it appears Amos did not know, and this supports dating the book at about 750, or earlier, for if it was later, Amos should have known that Assyria was to be the instrument of God's destruction.

Amos 3:12-15 (Total Destruction of Samaria)

Improper, sinful worship occurs at the altars of Bethel (3:14). Sinful luxury abounds in their winter houses, summer houses, ivory houses, and their having many (or

³⁶ Shapiro, 329-330.

³⁷ Clements, 24.

"great") houses in the first place (3:15). On an ethical note, Ackroyd writes, "Israel is therefore found guilty of coming into the presence of God to worship with the guilt of irreligion and immorality upon her."³⁸ On the idea of a remnant, Martin-Achard states, "There is no need to speculate on the notion of a 'remnant', for this does not play any positive role with Amos, even though it has often been attributed to him."³⁹

Amos 4:1-3 (Cows of Bashan)

4:1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan
 who are on Mount Samaria,
 who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,
 who say to their husbands, "Bring something to drink!"

Rich women in Samaria live in luxury while oppressing and exploiting the poor and needy.

Amos 4:4-5 (The Worship Game)

4:4 Come to Bethel--and transgress;
 to Gilgal--and multiply transgression;
 bring your sacrifices every morning,
 your tithes every three days;
 4:5 bring a thank offering of leavened bread,
 and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them;
 for so you love to do, O people of Israel!
 says the Lord GOD.

The worship at Bethel and Gilgal is useless, sinful, and abominable to God. God is sick of their meticulous ritual observance, for it is hypocritical to worship as they do while their social, economical, and political lives so grossly violate God's will and covenant. Ackroyd writes, "Worship itself becomes a sin; the more Israel worships in an

³⁸ Ackroyd, 8.

³⁹ Martin-Achard, 31.

unfit state, the more she fails."⁴⁰ Stuhlmueller notes that Amos in these verses is not against liturgical worship, but unworthy motives. By the way, Stuhlmueller paraphrases "for so you love to do" as, "You get a kick out of it, don't you, folks!"⁴¹ Paton devoted a whole article to the issue connected with these verses of whether Amos condemned calf worship at Bethel. Paton concludes that Amos condemned the entire worship at Bethel, including calf worship, but did not have to mention calf worship or other specific parts of the worship going on there since he already condemned all of it as a whole. Excerpts of his argument appears below.

Amos never once mentions the calves in the book of his prophecy, nor does he utter a single word which can fairly be construed as a direct condemnation of this form of worship.

It would thus appear from our brief survey of the history of the northern kingdom, that the calf-worship enjoyed an undisturbed existence from the time of Jeroboam I to the time of Amos, and that during this long period not one voice was raised in opposition to it as an illegitimate way of worshiping Yahweh.

Particularly in the case of Amos, it is almost impossible to believe that his failure to condemn the calf-worship explicitly is due to approval of this institution.

Suppose that Amos regarded the whole religion of the northern kingdom as so corrupt as no longer to be entitled to the name of worship of Yahweh, then his failure to mention the calves might be due to the fact that he regarded them as simply one feature in a system which, although nominally the worship of Yahweh, was practically heathenism.

The cult at Bethel is not a perversion of Yahweh's worship, it is apostasy from it.

It is the evil of worshiping under the name of Yahweh another god than Yahweh.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ackroyd, 8.

⁴¹ Stuhlmueller, 17-18.

⁴² Lewis B. Paton, "Did Amos approve the Calf-Worship at Bethel?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 13 (1984): 81, 82, 83, 88.

Amos 4:6-12 (Unlearned Lessons)

4:6 I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,
and lack of bread in all your places,
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

4:7 And I also withheld the rain from you
when there were still three months to the harvest;
I would send rain on one city,
and send no rain on another city;
one field would be rained upon,
and the field on which it did not rain withered;
4:8 so two or three towns wandered to one town
to drink water, and were not satisfied;
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

4:9 I struck you with blight and mildew;
I laid waste your gardens and your vineyards;
the locust devoured your fig trees and your olive trees;
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

4:10 I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt;
I killed your young men with the sword;
I carried away your horses;
and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils;
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

4:11 I overthrew some of you,
as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,
and you were like a brand snatched from the fire;
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

4:12 Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel;
because I will do this to you,
prepare to meet your God, O Israel!

God has tried to correct them and get their attention at least these five times, but, in spite of this, they never returned to God. They never repented and never learned, no matter how hard God tried to save them from their own blind drive toward destruction.

Amos 4:13-5:5 (Hymn Fragment, Funeral Dirge, etc.)

The foundation of ethics for Amos is the nature of God (4:13). God is the creator of the world, involved in the events of history and humanity, and extremely powerful. Amos sees Yahweh as the God of hosts, the God above all and in charge of all. Amos, using the funeral dirge meter, sings the song at Israel's funeral (5:1-2). For Amos, Israel's death was already certain and determined by God. Koch writes, "The genre itself tells in favour [sic] of the irreversibility of the doom Amos foresees . . . the funeral lament."⁴³ Using today's imagery, one could say that the Israelites might as well go ahead and buy their own caskets, flowers, and cemetery plots. It is over; Israel will be destroyed (5:3). Amos 5:4-5 seems contrary to the message of doom, but, as in 5:15, it may refer to the fact that those who repent will be spared, even though Israel, as a whole, will inevitably be destroyed. In the context of the book, it seems that Amos expects few, if any, to heed this message of hope. These verses offer the possibility for some to live, if they abandon Bethel and Gilgal. This is a life and death issue, and reminds the people that life comes from God, not places of worship.

Amos 5:6-7 (Seek Yahweh, and Live)

5:6 Seek the LORD and live,
 or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire,
 and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it.

5:7 Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood,
 and bring righteousness to the ground!

Theologically, the nature of God is life. Apart from God is death. Amos describes sins in general terms: injustice and unrighteousness (5:7). Williams writes,

⁴³ Koch, 44.

". . . 'to seek Yahweh' means to encounter the God revealed to Moses at the burning bush, to reaffirm the covenant made at Sinai which involved a mutual contract between Yahweh and his people."⁴⁴ Wal and Talstra do not see 5:6-7 to be part of the same unit in Amos. Their research suggests that 5:7-6:12 is one unit.⁴⁵

Amos 5:8-9 (Hymn Fragment)

The nature of God includes God's control of the forces of nature and nations. God controls events in nature and history.

Amos 5:10-13 (Oppressors of the Powerless)

5:10 They hate the one who reproves in the gate,
and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.

5:11 Therefore because you trample on the poor
and take from them levies of grain,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.

5:12 For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins--
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate.

Israel's sins here include a hatred and thwarting of justice and of those who try to be just (5:10, 12), oppression and exploitation of the poor and powerless (5:11, 12), and

⁴⁴ Williams, 402.

⁴⁵ Wal and Talstra identify these words as occurring three or more times in 5:7-6:12: טוב (3 times), מושפט (4 times), צדקה (3 times), יע (4 times), מספָד (3 times), טנא (4 times), and שער (3 times). They conclude: "This proves that this part of Amos is built on the contrast between the semantic field 'good' en [sic] the semantic field 'evil.' To the semantic field "good" belong words as טוב ; but terms which occur less frequently such as en [sic] can also be included. To the semantic field "evil" belongs first of all the word רע , but in a broader sense terms like בשׁט , חטאת , טנא , בשׁט and בַּעַב also belong here." Adri van der Wal and Eep Talstra, *Amos: Concordance and Lexical Surveys* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1984), 121.

excessive luxury at the expense of the exploited poor (5:11). The nature of God includes God's omniscience and knowledge of the number and severity of Israel's sins (5:12).

Amos 5:14-15 (Seek Good, Not Evil)

5:14 Seek good and not evil,
 that you may live;
 and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you,
 just as you have said.

5:15 Hate evil and love good,
 and establish justice in the gate;
 it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts,
 will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

To seek good is to seek Yahweh. This passage connects with 5:6. Howie writes, "To seek God meant to seek him by seeking good, through justice at law and righteousness in everyday affairs."⁴⁶ The nature of God includes that God will be with those who seek good and not evil. For God to be with you is life; for God not to be with you is death. The ethical imperative here is that God commands the establishment of justice in the gate, the only place the powerless has recourse to when mistreated. The nature of God includes Yahweh's desire to be gracious, if possible. The presence of God's grace among the people is a function of the people's morality. Note that, in this passage, the possibility of God's grace is *after* the coming destruction of Israel; it does not prevent the inevitable doom of the nation. The effect of this message is that, if those few that Amos wishes would return to God continue to refuse to seek justice, good, and Yahweh, then there will not even be any remnant left after the destruction of Israel.

⁴⁶ Howie, 283.

Amos 5:16-20 (A Time for Mourning)

Amos 5:18 begins the first of three "alas" passages ("woe" in other versions). The other two instances of "alas" are 6:1 and 6:4. Amos responds to those who hold on to the hope of the day of Yahweh, thinking God is bound to protect them regardless of their spiritual condition (5:18). They fail to understand their own Hebrew theology.

Martin-Achard holds that Amos probably answers reactions and counter claims of his listeners here.⁴⁷ For a full account and discussion of all 16 passages in the Old Testament referring to the "Day of Yahweh" (5:18), see von Rad's eighth chapter.⁴⁸

Amos 5:21-24 (Disgusting Worship)

- 5:21 I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
- 5:22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
- 5:23 Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
- 5:24 But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

God rejects the rituals and worship ceremonies from those who reject justice and righteousness. Clearly, motive for worship is more important than worship itself; the morality of the worshiper is more important than the mode of the worshiping. God's ethical imperative, in general terms, is to practice justice and righteousness. McCullough writes, "It may be inferred from 5:22-24 that the basis for Amos's criticism of the current rites is the moral deficiency of the worshipers."⁴⁹ Kapelrud notes, "What Yahweh

⁴⁷ Martin-Achard, 44.

⁴⁸ von Rad, 95-99.

⁴⁹ McCullough, 251.

demanded was not sacrifices, festal gatherings and songs, but righteousness."⁵⁰

Amos 5:25-27 (Sin of Idolatry)

5:25 Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 26 You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves; 27 therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

The answer to the question is "no." The point is that God was with the Israelites those forty years without sacrifices. Therefore, it is not worship rituals that bring God's favor and presence; it is moral living according to God's will, especially justice and righteousness.

Amos 6:1-3 (False Security)

6:1 Alas for those who are at ease in Zion,
and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria,
the notables of the first of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel resorts!

6:2 Cross over to Calneh, and see;
from there go to Hamath the great;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
Are you better than these kingdoms?
Or is your territory greater than their territory,

6:3 O you that put far away the evil day,
and bring near a reign of violence?

This is the second "alas" passage. Amos mourns the inevitable death of those wealthy notable members of society who think nothing bad could happen to them and who are totally unaware they will soon be destroyed. Their sin is that they think they can continue to live sinful lives contrary to the will of God, without fear of retribution. They believe the same lie the serpent gave to Eve. They think to themselves, "We will not die;

⁵⁰ Kapelrud, 33.

God is not going to do anything to us; God will not punish us for our sins." They are wrong.

Amos 6:4-7 (Sinful Luxury)

- 6:4 Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;
- 6:5 who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,
and like David improvise on instruments of music;
- 6:6 who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
- 6:7 Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

This is the third "alas" passage. The wealthy, caring only about their leisure, luxury, and lounging around, do not care about what really matters. They party on while their nation, themselves included, faces imminent destruction. Coote suggests Amos was referring here to the *marzech* feast, which was limited to the elite and ruling class, and in which the participants usually drank themselves into a stupor.⁵¹

Amos 6:8 (Sinful Pride)

- 6:8 The Lord God has sworn by himself
(says the LORD, the God of hosts):
I abhor the pride of Jacob
and hate his strongholds;
and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.

Pride is also among the sins of Israel.

Amos 6:9-10 (Complete Destruction)

Amos gives another illustration of the totality of the destruction.

⁵¹ Coote, 37,38.

Amos 6:11-14 (The Absurdity of Sin)

6:12 Do horses run on rocks?
 Does one plow the sea with oxen?
 But you have turned justice into poison
 and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood--
 6:13 you who rejoice in Lo-debar,
 who say, "Have we not by our own strength
 taken Karnaim for ourselves?"

These wisdom sayings focus on sin against justice and righteousness. This is a recurring theme in Amos (6:12). Pride is again mentioned as a sin of Israel (6:13).

Amos 7:1-6 (Visions of Locusts and Fire)

Amos intercedes on Israel's behalf, and God relents of destroying Israel in the first two of five visions.

Amos 7:7-9 (Plumb Line Vision)

7:8 And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said,
 "See, I am setting a plumb line
 in the midst of my people Israel;
 I will never again pass them by;

Amos no longer intercedes for Israel in the third vision. Israel is so far out of plumb that it must be destroyed. Israel represents a "condemned" house no longer structurally sound or fit to be God's dwelling place. Clements maintains that the תְּוָן refers not to a plumb line, but to a military weapon.⁵² It is possible, but Mays claims that תְּוָן literally refers to the lead weight itself that is part of a plumb line.⁵³ I see no reason

⁵² Clements, 24-25.

⁵³ Mays, 132.

to read it as anything other than a plumb line; the image fits well with Israel's not measuring up to God's standards.

Amos 7:10-17 (Banned from Bethel)

7:16 Now therefore hear the word of the LORD.
 You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel,
 and do not preach against the house of Isaac.'

Amos clashes with the priest, Amaziah, at Bethel. God judges Amaziah for telling Amos not to prophesy in Israel. Amaziah's sin is that, by telling Amos not to prophesy, he tells God to shut up, since God is the one who told Amos to prophesy in the first place.

Amos 8:1-3 (Summer Fruit Vision)

This fourth vision shows the "end" is near for Israel.

Amos 8:4-6 (Economic Sins)

8:4 Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
 and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
 8:5 saying, "When will the new moon be over
 so that we may sell grain;
 and the sabbath,
 so that we may offer wheat for sale?
 We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
 and practice deceit with false balances,
 8:6 buying the poor for silver
 and the needy for a pair of sandals,
 and selling the sweepings of the wheat."

Economic greed has become so all-consuming that even while attending worship services, all they can think of is (my paraphrase) "When will this stupid service be over so I can get back to cheating all those poor suckers out of their money?" They do not care about holy days or worship itself. They sin by inflating prices, lowering the quality

and quantity of their products, and using dishonest measuring devices. Again, they are guilty of exploiting and oppressing the poor and powerless.

Amos 8:7-12 (Coming Destruction and Exile)

Martin-Achard suggests the famine, not of food but of God (8:11), is another way of saying "they are excommunicated."⁵⁴ Also concerning 8:11, Alger notes, "The ultimate punishment appears to be the absence of Yahweh . . ."⁵⁵ The absence of God and death appear to me to be synonyms in Amos and the rest of the Bible as well.

Amos 8:13-14 (Misplaced Trust)

8:14 Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria,
and say, "As your god lives, O Dan,"
and, "As the way of Beer-sheba lives"--
they shall fall, and never rise again.

Idolatry and false worship are among the sins of Israel.

Amos 9:1-15 (Vision Story, Restoration Passages, etc.)

The truth Kelso sees in 9:5-14 is: "To all nations, the wages of sin is death. Israel is no exception."⁵⁶ On an ethical note concerning 9:7, Kapelrud writes, "Amos saw Yahweh as the god not only of Israel, but of all nations. . . . Therefore the ethical demands of Yahweh were valid also for other peoples than Israel."⁵⁷ Most scholars see 9:11-15 as an exilic or post-exilic addition to Amos, and I tend to agree with them. However, some, like Williams and von Rad, hold these verses are authentic Amos.

⁵⁴ Martin-Achard 60.

⁵⁵ Alger, 116.

⁵⁶ Kelso, 62.

⁵⁷ Kapelrud, 37.

Williams writes, "The common practice is to interpret as an addition to the prophecies of Amos by a later Judean editor who wrote in the light of the destruction of Judah by Nebuchadrezzar in 586 B.C. However, that Amos, the prophet from Judah, would make no reference to the cherished Davidic traditions of the south seems wholly inconceivable."⁵⁸ Even if this passage was a later addition, von Rad argues that it is authentic Amos, handed down from the Judah tradition.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Williams, 403.

⁵⁹ von Rad, 108-9.

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